Making the worst of a bad situation: How the interpersonal conflict between Foreign Minister Jozef Beck and Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly affected Poland's perception of the German threat in the run-up to the Second World War

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Abstract

The institutional conflict examined in this thesis can be traced back to the successful military coup of 1926, which elevated Marshal Jozef Pilsudski to dictatorship. Given the Marshal's interest in military and foreign policy matters, he was actively involved in the formation of both, ensuring their coherence. Unfortunately, following Pilsudski's death in 1935, the 'Sanacja' regime plunged into internal conflict. Rydz-Smigly, who succeeded Pilsudski as the General Inspector of the Armed Forces, soon became involved in the domestic power struggle. Named the Second Person in the state in 1936 and promoted to Marshal, Rydz-Smigly sought greater involvement in foreign policy. This interference met with resistance from the Polish Foreign Minister Jozef Beck. The troubled relationship between both men embodied the civil-military conflict in 1930s Poland and is the main subject of this doctorate. This thesis examines the extent in which it affected Polish military preparedness in 1939 by delaying the process of defensive planning. It also subject considers the impact that the tension between the Foreign Ministry and the General Staff had on the flow of strategically important information.

Save for Roman Wapinski, whose work focuses on the dynamic between Polish foreign and domestic policy, the historiography to date has failed to address the importance of this institutional and personal rivalry and tended to focus on either diplomatic (e.g. Piotr Wandycz, Anna Cienciala, Marek Kornat, Stanislaw Zerko, Michal Zacharias) or military (e.g. Marian Zgorniak, Marian Leczyk, Mieczyslaw Cieplewicz, Leszek Gadek, Piotr Stawecki) history. This dissertation looks at both

and contrasts the diplomats and military men’s different attitudes to Germany. It argues that this dissonance in approach impaired the Polish military and civilian authorities' ability to accurately assess the German threat and, consequently, affected Poland's defence in September 1939.

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List of abbreviations used throughout this thesis

Archives:

TNA – The National Archives

AAN – Archiwum Akt Nowych [The Modern Document Archive]

PISM – Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum

JPIoA – Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America

JPI-London – Jozef Pilsudski Institute - London

Political Parties:

OZN – Oboz Zjednoczenia Narodowego [Camp for National Unity]

BBWR – Bezpartyjny Blok Wspolpracy z Rzadem [Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government]

PSL – Polskie Stonnictwo Ludowe [Polish People's Party] – the Peasant's party

Other:

GISZ – Glowny Inspectorat Sil Zbrojnych [The General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces]

Glossary of persons

Arciszewski, Miroslaw – Polish Ambassador in Romania (1932 – 1938), Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs (1938 – 1939).

Barthou, Louis – French Minister for Foreign Affairs (1934).

Beck, Jozef – Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs (1932 – 1939).

Beck, Jadwiga – Jozef Beck's wife.

Biddle, Anthony J. Drexel, Jr. – US Ambassador in Poland (1937 – 1944).

Benes, Eduard – Czechoslovak President (1935 – 1938).

Bonnet, Georges – French Minister for Foreign Affairs (1938 – 1939).

Bullitt, William C. – US Ambassador in the Soviet Union (1933 – 1936), US Ambassador in France (1936 – 1940).

Burhadt – Bukacki, Stanislaw – general in the Polish Army, Jadwiga Beck's first husband.

Chamberlain, Neville – British Prime Minister (1937 – 1940).

Chiczewski, Feliks – diplomat, Polish Consul General in Leipzig (

Chlapowski, Alfred – Polish Ambassador in France (1924 – 1936).

Chodacki, Marian – diplomat, Commissioner General of the Republic of Poland in the Free City of Gdansk (1936 – 1939).

Churchill, Winston – British Member of Parliament.

Ciano, Galeazzo – Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs (1936 – 1943).

Daladier, Edouard – French Defense Minister (1936 – 1940), Prime Minister (1933 – 1934, 1938 – 1940).

Delbos, Yvon – French Minister for Foreign Affairs (1936 – 1938).

Dlugoszowski – Wieniawa, Boleslaw – general in the Polish Army, Polish

Ambassador in Italy (1938 – 1940).

Eden, Anthony – British Minister for Foreign Affairs (1936 – 1938).

Frankowski, Feliks – Polish diplomat, Counsellor in the Polish Embassy in France.

Fyda, Wojciech – colonel, Polish Military Attache in France.

Gamelin, Maurice – general in the French Army, Commander in Chief and Chief of General Staff.

Goering, Hermann – Marshal of the German Third Reich.

Halifax, Edward – British Minister for Foreign Affairs (1938 – 1940).

Hitler, Adolf – Chancellor of the German Third Reich (1933 – 1945).

Hlond, August – Polish cardinal.

Kasprzycki, Tadeusz – general in the Polish Army, Polish Minister for Military Affairs (1935 – 1939).

Kennard, Howard – British Ambassador to Poland (1935 – 1941).

Koc, Adam – leader of the Camp of National Unity (1937 – 1938).

Kwiatkowski, Eugeniusz – Polish Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister (1935 – 1939).

Lipski, Jozef – Polish Ambasador in Germany (1933 – 1939).

Lubienski, Michal – diplomat, Minister Beck's Chef de Cabinet.

Lukasiewicz, Juliusz – Polish Ambassador in the Soviet Union (1933 – 1936), Polish Ambassador in France (1936 – 1939).

Mackiewicz, Stanislaw (Cat) – journalist, Editor in Chief of *Slowo*.

Moltke, Hans Adolf von – German Amabassador to Poland (1931 – 1939).

Molotov, Vyacheslav – Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs (1939 – 1949).

Morawski, Kajetan – Polish Deputy Finance Minister (1936 – 1939).

Moscicki, Ignacy – Polish President (1926 – 1939).

Mussolini, Benito – Italian leader (1922 – 1943).

Neurath, Constantin von – German Minister for Foreign Affairs (1932 – 1938).

Noel, Leon – French Ambassador in Poland (1935 – 1939).

Paul-Boncour, Joseph – French Minister for Foreign Affairs (1933 – 1938).

Pelczynski, Taduesz – colonel, Head of the Second Department of Polish General Staff (1929 – 1939).

Papee, Kazimierz – Polish Legate in Czechoslovakia (1936 – 1939).

Pilsudski, Jozef – Marshal of Poland

Potocki, Jerzy – Polish Ambassador in the United States of America (1936 – 1940).

Potocki, Jozef – diplomat, Director of the Political Department at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Raczysnki, Edward – Polish Ambassador in the United Kingdom (1934 – 1945).

Raczynski, Roger – Polish Ambassador in Romania (1938 – 1940).

Ribbentrop, Joachim von – German Minister for Foreign Affairs (1938 – 1939).

Romer, Taduesz – Polish Legate in Portugal (1935 – 1937), Polish Ambassador in Japan (1937 – 1941).

Rydz – Smigly, Edward – Marshal of Poland, General Inspector for the Armed Forces and Commander in Chief (1935 – 1939).

Simon, John – British Minister for Foreign Affairs (1931 – 1935).

Skladkowski – Slawoj, Felicjan – Polish Prime Minister (1936 – 1939).

Slavic, Juraj – Czechoslovak Legate in Poland (1935 – 1939).

Smolenski, Jozef – colonel, Head of the Second Department of the General Staff (1939).

Sosnowski, Kazimierz – general in the Polish Army, Chief of the General Staff (1935 – 1939).

Strang, William – British diplomat, Head of the Central Department (1937 – 1939).

Szymanski, Antoni – colonel, Polish Military Attache in Germany.

Szembek, Jan – Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs (1932 – 1939).

Titulescu, Nicolae – Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs (1932 – 1936).

Vansittart, Robert – British diplomat, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1930 – 1938).

Weizaecker, Ernst von – Head of the Political Department in the Auswartiges Amt (1933 – 1938).

Witos, Wincenty – Polish Prime Minister (1920 – 1921, 1923, 1926).

Wysocki, Alfred – Polish Ambassador in Italy (1933 – 1938).

Zaleski, August – Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs (1926 – 1932).

Introduction

This doctoral thesis focuses on the animosity between the Polish Foreign Minister Jozef Beck and the General Inspector of the Armed Forces Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly.[1] This strife has not been analysed in any detail in either English- or Polish-language historiography. My first aim is to fill this important gap in the literature about the Polish response to the German threat in the late 1930s. I will look at the reasons behind the conflict and chart its evolution from inception – amid the power vacuum created by Marshal's Pilsudski's death in May 1935 to its culmination in early 1939. This period coincided with the weakening of Poland's ally France and the rise of Nazi Germany but, as this thesis demonstrates, the deterioration of Poland's strategic position can only partly be explained by the changes on the international stage.

My second task is to examine the extent to which the troubled relationship between the heads of the Polish armed forces and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs affected their cooperation in the strategic sphere, and specifically whether it influenced the Polish perception of the German threat, subsequently undermining the country's military preparedness in 1939.

My multi-archival research, undertaken for the purpose of this study, has uncovered new and significant evidence that will contribute to a better historical understanding of the Polish foreign policy in the 1930s and the change in the

[1] As General Inspector of the Armed Forces Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly oversaw the Polish Army, Air Force and Navy. In the event of war, the General Inspector was due to assume the responsibility of Commander in Chief. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a table outlining the Polish military command structure in the period immediately preceding the Second World War.

country's military threat perception. An analysis of historical sources allows us to confirm the existence of a strategically debilitating conflict between Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly and Minister Jozef Beck, and thus to unravel the internal crisis that significantly weakened the state in the face of German aggression.

In pursuit of an answer to the question, *did the discord between Rydz and Beck led Poland to make the worst of a bad situation,* I will consider a number of secondary questions: (1) How did Marshal Pilsudski's legacy affect Poland's diplomatic and defensive strategy? (2) Did the strategy change in the period considered? (3) Why did the relationship between Beck and Rydz-Smigly deteriorate? (4) Why did Marshal Rydz-Smigly seek control of the Polish Foreign Policy? (5) How did Rydz-Smigly and Beck differ in their perceptions of Hitler and why? (6) How accurate was Polish intelligence on Germany in the run-up to the Second World War? (7) What impact did the crises of 1938 have on Poland's preparations for the Second World War? (8) Why did the preparation of Western Defence Plan begin as late as March 1939? (9) How was it possible for Jozef Beck to conceal before Rydz and President Moscicki, the German ultimatum to Poland of 24 October 1938 for three months? What consequences did his decision have on the Polish leadership's threat perception? (10) Why were the whistle-blowers (ambassador Jozef Lipski and military attaché Antonii Szymanski, both from the Polish Berlin Embassy) ignored in 1939?

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Historiographical Review

Before exploring the available sources and explaining the methodology used in

this study, let me consider the existing historiography on inter-war Polish foreign and defence policy. The sheer abundance of written material may seem overwhelming, yet, save for the Polish historian Roman Wapinski, whose work focused on the interaction between Polish foreign and domestic policy, the historical discourse to date has tended to focus on either Polish diplomatic or military history rather than on the course and impact of the country's civil-military relations. Historians have failed to address the importance of institutional and personal rivalries among the Polish military and civilian authorities and to assess whether the dissonance between them impaired the Polish ability to accurately understand the German threat and, consequently, affected the country's defence in September 1939. This doctoral thesis sets out to rectify this omission.

I have identified two broad themes that shaped and continue to dominate the writings on Polish pre-war foreign policy. Those are: (i) personalities and relationships within the Polish ruling elites and (ii) military preparedness in 1939. These will be examined below:

(i) Personalities and Relationships

The origins of the institutional conflict examined in this thesis can be traced to the successful military coup of 1926 that elevated Jozef Pilsudski to the dictatorship of Poland. Given the Marshal's interest in military and foreign policy matters, it is hardly surprising that he took active part in the formation of both and ensured their coherence. Unfortunately, following Pilsudski's death in 1935, his authoritarian

government, known as the 'Sanacja' regime, plunged into internal conflict. Though not initially interested in politics, Rydz-Smigly, who succeeded Pilsudski as the General Inspector of the Armed Forces[2] but not in his other roles, soon became involved in the domestic power struggle. Named the 'Second Person in the State' in 1936 by President Ignacy Moscicki and promoted to Field Marshal, Rydz-Smigly sought greater involvement in foreign policy. Naturally, this interference met with resistance from Foreign Minister Jozef Beck. The troubled relationship between both men embodied the civil-military conflict that will be the main subject of this thesis. Beck initially refused to serve in the government headed by Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski, Rydz-Smigly's protégé. Both men were, fatefully, at odds over Germany and the brief 1937 and 1938 alliances they made merely punctuated their protracted hostility. Then, this thesis will focus on the way in which it affected Polish military preparedness in 1939 by delaying the process of war planning. Finally, it will assess the impact of the tension between the Foreign Ministry and General Staff on the flow of strategically important information in the Government.

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Short biographical and character sketches of Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly and Minister Jozef Beck will be provided in Chapter Two, which will familiarise readers with the key personalities featured in this thesis. Here, however, I will review the extensive literature on Minister Beck, the 'Colonels' forming Pilsudski's inner circle and Poland's key diplomats.

[2] A key military post equivalent to that of a Commander in Chief.

(a) Jozef Beck

In their collection of biographical sketches of Second Republic politicians, Jacek Czajkowski and Jacek Majchrowski state that 'when looking at the different solutions and richness of conceptions for restructuring of Poland's internal affairs; historians usually do not see beyond the big three: Pilsudski, Dmowski and Witos.'[3] Paraphrasing them, one could say that looking at the available literature on Polish foreign policy in the decade preceding the Second World War, historians usually only see one person – Józef Beck. He is usually portrayed as somehow detached and isolated in his decision making process – Pilsudski's adherent but disconnected from anyone else.

This description is inaccurate. For instance, one of the best examples of both Beck's struggle to maintain autonomy, and of the limits to his power, is his initial concealment of Germany's territorial demands presented to Lipski on 24 October 1938. Unsure as to whether they were issued at Ribbentrop's own initiative or came from Hitler, and wary of Rydz's interference in policy-making towards Germany, the Foreign Minister concealed them until his early January 1939 visit to Berchtesgaden. Only then, having confirmed Hitler's involvement, did Beck inform Moscicki and Rydz-Smigly about German territorial claims.[4] This was followed by an emergency meeting in the presidential residence. On 8 January, the National Defence Council consisting of Beck, Rydz, Prime Minister Skladkowski and Finance Minister Kwiatkowski, chaired by President Moscicki, decided to reject the German demands,

[3] Jacek Czajkowski and Jacek M. Majchrowski, *Sylwetki politykow Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*Politicians of the Second Polish Republic*], *(*Krakow, 1986), 5.

[4] Marek Kornat, *Polityka Równowagi 1934-1939. Polska miedzy Wschodem a Zachodem* [*The policy of equilibrium 1934-1939: Poland between the East and the West*], (Krakow, 2007), 408.

thus fixing Poland's policy toward Germany until the outbreak of the war.[5] We see that while Beck was granted some level of independence and although he tried to stretch it, he was certainly not allowed to make foreign policy on his own.

Indeed, analysis of the available literature focuses on Beck, and Poland's foreign policy, at the expense of the country's military policy shaped by Beck's 'rival' Rydz-Smigly. Historians minutely dissect Beck's policies and decisions yet overwhelmingly ignore Rydz's constant presence and influence. Their recording of Rydz-Smigly's active participation in the negotiation of the Treaty of Rambouillet is the only notable exception.

However, in order to better understand the scholarly debate surrounding Beck's public persona, let me briefly focus on the man himself. Having taken office on 2 November 1932, Józef Beck was the longest serving Foreign Affairs Minister of the Second Polish Republic. He was handpicked for the post by Pilsudski and, in his own eyes at least, remained a loyal executor of the Marshal's political testament of 1935 in the foreign sphere. A former intelligence officer and extremely private person, Beck did not keep a diary. His *Final Report* (also known by its French title, *Le Denier Rapport*) of 1943 was in fact nothing more than the titular final report intended for the President of the Polish Government in Exile Edward Raczkiewicz and dictated by a terminally ill Beck under internment in Romania. It focuses purely on his activity as Foreign Minister and does not, as such, afford much insight into his decision-making habits or wider political beliefs.

Always worried about the journey his words would take once spoken, Beck was an autocratic boss and believed in controlling his subordinates by restricting the

[5] Romuald Szeremietiew, *Czy Moglismy Przetrwac: Polska a Niemcy w Latach 1918-1939* [*Could we have survived: Poland and Germany between 1918 and 1939*], (Warszawa, 1994), 306.

information available to them. In his memoir, Beck's private secretary Pawel Starzenski recalls that

> at the base of Beck's work lay the belief that an agency's chief should concentrate on its specific role. And that, should it become necessary, the central office would inform them about other matters. Only the most important legates and ambassadors were briefed by Beck and even then he exercised a lot of discretion. Very few could say they knew Beck's policy doctrine let alone his actual thoughts and hesitations.[6]

Fortunately for historians, a number of Beck's contemporaries were rather less secretive. This has allowed us to reconstruct Beck's behaviour in office. The most useful publications concerning Beck as a Minister are the diary and documents of his deputy Count Szembek, and secretary Pawel Starzenski's, *Trzy lata z Beckiem*. Nonetheless, the late composition of his account, compiled by Starzenski using old notes, has prompted some historians (e.g. Henryk Batowski) to question their reliability. Further insights about Beck as both a private person and a politician can also be found in the writings of his close friend, the Religion and Education Minister, Waclaw Jedrzejewicz, while the unpublished manuscript of the memoir written by Beck's closest colleague and Chef de Cabinet, Michal Lubienski, held in New York by the Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America, also offers analysis of the Minister's views and character.

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[6] Pawel Starzenski, *Trzy lata z Beckiem* [*Three years with Beck*], (London, 1972), 54.

His terse telegrams and official reports could suggest that Beck was not much of a writer. He did, however, maintain a lively and interesting correspondence with count Raczynski, the Ambassador in London, and one of his close friends, Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, at first a general and subsequently Ambassador to Rome between 1938 and 1940.

The politician-priest, Bronislaw Zongollowicz, an avid and shrewd commentator, also paid a lot of attention to Beck's activity as a minister, his personality and his sometimes troubled relationships, Beck's friendship with the leader of the so-called 'Colonels' Clique', Walery Slawek, former Prime minister, and Pilsudski's closest friend, as well as occasional tensions with President Moscicki and, particularly in the later years, the General Inspector for the Armed Forces - Edward Rydz-Smigly.

Finally, an unusual but, nevertheless, one of the most interesting account of Beck's life can be found in his wife's memoirs *Kiedy bylam Ekscelencja*. Beginning with the rushed journey back from a holiday in Africa to answer Pilsudski's summons, Mrs Beck describes the background of official visits to, among others, the Soviet Union, Italy and Germany. She reflects on the couple's social life in 1930s Warsaw and portrays Beck as an ordinary person.

Beck's depiction by historians differs radically from the picture of a warm, devoted husband and a dog lover drawn by his wife. Gerhard Weinberg remarks that most scholars of the inter-war period consider Beck to personify Poland's new doctrine of greater independence and looser ties with France. Describing him as 'young, vain, and with the reputation of having a slippery tongue' as well as 'a coldly opportunistic follower of Pilsudski', and addressing Beck's 'pro-German

reputation', Weinberg warns against falling into the trap of oversimplifying his political views: 'like Pilsudski, he wanted Poland to observe a balance in its relations with Germany and Russia – trying to keep its two neighbours from becoming so friendly that they might agree to divide Poland between them, or so hostile that they might force Poland to side with one against the other.'[7]

Piotr Wandycz and Anna Cienciala, who have both produced extensive monographs on Polish foreign policy in the 1930s and are regarded as authorities in the field, hold similar views. Cienciala even argues that the term 'Beck's policy' is confusing and should not be used,[8] whereas Wandycz has spent considerable time dismantling the 'myth of Poland [viewing itself] as a Great Power'.[9] Indeed, most contemporary Polish historians often complain about what they call the 'Black Legend of Józef Beck.'[10] The 'Black Legend' is the suggestion that Jozef Beck knowingly pursued the worst foreign policy for Poland and could thus be held accountable for the September 1939 fiasco. It was promoted by the Wladyslaw Sikorski administration in exile and later incorporated into the Polish communist historiography. In accordance with the 'Black Legend', Beck has been commonly portrayed as a Germanophilic, short sighted, aloof and politically reckless individual. Henry Roberts remarks that:

> Among the public figures of countries overrun by Nazi Germany, Colonel Józef Beck, Poland's Foreign Minister from 1932 to 1939,

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7 Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36*, (Chicago, 1970), 58.

8 Anna Cienciala, *Polska Polityka Zagraniczna w latach 1926-1932* [*Polish Foreign Policy between 1926 and 1932*], (Paris, 1990), 23.

9 Piotr Wandycz, *Z dziejow dyplomacji* [*From diplomatic history*], (London, 1988), 84-85.

10 Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 85.

> has probably received the least sympathy. Despite his determined resistance to Hitler's threats leading to the outbreak of the Second World War, he has been remembered as one of the Pilsudskian epigoni, as the man who refused to work with the Little Entente or the League of Nations, who pursued, in substance, a pro-German policy after 1934, who joined in the dismembering of Czechoslovakia, and, finally as the man whose stubborn refusal to enter any combination with the Russians contributed to the failure of the Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations of the spring and summer of 1939.[11]

Hugh Seton-Watson has likened Beck to a 'Machiavellian genius' - a description sparked perhaps by Leon Noel's depiction of the Foreign Minister.[12] The French Ambassador's dislike of Beck was common knowledge but even he described Beck as 'one of the most unusual, in certain respects one of the most mysterious, and above all one of the most interesting persons it has fallen to me to be associated with.'[13] D.C. Watt referred to Beck as 'foxy', devious and two faced'.[14] He did not, however, share some of the other commentators' apparent awe for Beck's diplomatic abilities. Writing about his conduct during the Czechoslovak crisis, Watt compares him to the Italian foreign ministry Count Ciano and states that 'in negotiation his

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[11] Henry L. Roberts, 'The Diplomacy of colonel Beck', *The Diplomats 1919*-1939, Gordon A Craig and Felix Gilbert (eds), (Princeton, 1953), 579.
[12] Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941* (Cambridge, 1945), 388.
[13] Roberts, 'The Diplomacy', 580-581.
[14] Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War 1938-1939* (London, 2001), 58.

style varied from a legalistic stonewalling to an arrogant imposition of conditions.'[15] While this description might, on the whole, be accurate, Anna Cienciala argues that Poland's foreign policy was heavily influenced by the actions of the Great Powers and that Beck's ultimatum to Prague was a result of the Munich Conference and Czechoslovakia's capitulation rather than Poland's revanchism.[16] Another Polish historian trying to break with the aforementioned 'black legend' is Marek Kornat. Together with Mariusz Wolos, they are currently working on Beck's first, comprehensive, biography.[17] The minister's interesting biographical sketch is also included in Kornat's book *Polityka rownowagi 1934-1939*: *Polska miedzy Wschodem a Zachodem*, the essay focuses on Beck's three (or perhaps even four) attempts to leave office, which the author sees as confirming[18] that, contrary to his critics' opinions, Beck was not a power-hungry politician but a man with a sense of duty and conviction.[19]

Despite agreement that 1930s Poland produced no credible replacement for Beck, some scholars continue to ponder whether Polish history would have run a significantly different course had Beck not been the Foreign Minister in 1939. In fact, his original appointment was far from preordained. Beck hesitated to join the Koscialkowski government in 1935 and made at least two attempts to resign: in the autumn of 1938 and the spring of 1939.[20] Marek Kornat argues that, regardless of who would be at the helm, in 1939 Poland had no other real alternative than to

[15] Watt, *How War Came*, 59.
[16] Anna Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939. A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe* (London, 1968), 54.
[17] Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 386.
[18] The story of Beck's possible fourth resignation is examined in Chapter 5.
[19] Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 385.
[20] According to Beck's wife Jadwiga, he

follow the political course it did.[21] Gerhard Weinberg has expressed a similar opinion, stating in the two volume study *The Foreign Policy of Germany* that in 1939 'fighting was the only, even if hopeless, alternative' left to Poland.[22] As did another Polish historian, Michal Zacharias. Usually very critical of Beck and his policies, he makes the same argument in his work, which concentrates mostly on the Polish-Soviet relations and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.[23]

The question of whether Beck pursued the 'right' policy is inextricably linked to the problem of Pilsudski's foreign policy testament. According to Beck's own account, and the views of leading Sanacja figures, such as the Jedrzejewicz brothers, he remained forever faithful to Pilsudski's maxims and foreign policy principles. Many historians share this opinion of Beck. For instance, in the article cited above, Marek Kornat argues that Beck's attempts to quit confirm his devotion to Pilsudski's directives. The fact that some historians even argue that Beck's reliance on Pilsudski's directives rendered his policy in the late 1930s detached and inflexible serves as an indicator of how widely accepted this view is. There are, however, some who question that Beck was really the anointed executor of Pilsudski's last political will.

One of the opponents of this view was Beck's contemporary, Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz. While asserting that Beck followed the Marshall's directives until 1935, Cat-Mackiewicz argued that after Pilsudski's death, Beck 'conducted a policy which

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[21] Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 419.

[22] Gerhard Weinberg (1994), *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II 1937-1939*, (Chicago, 1970), 627.

[23] Marek Kazimierz Kaminski and Michal Jerzy Zacharias, *W Cieniu Zagrozenia: Polityka Zagraniczna RP 1918-1939* [*In Danger's Shadow: Polish Foreign Policy 1918-1939*], (Warszawa, 1993), 270.

– up until the final catastrophe – went completely against them.'[24] Two other observers of the politics of the Second Polish Republic, Jerzy Gedroyc and Adam Bien also put a similar view forward. They believed, perhaps mistakenly, that, instead of denouncing the idea of 'peace at any cost' and for the sake of national self-preservation, Poland should have ceded Danzig to Germany and allowed for the construction of an extraterritorial highway. Gedroyc even agued that had Pilsudski been alive at the time, there would have been no German-Polish war in 1939.[25] And even had there been one, as Jerzy Lojek has argued, Poland would have been better positioned for it as a German ally.[26]

Foreign scholars do not, usually; go as far as suggesting Poland should have become a Nazi ally. Despite that, there certainly exists a consensus amongst some of them that Poland's refusal to yield to Hitler's demands and her 'Great Power' ambitions created the conditions for the 1939 disaster. Jurgen Pagel and Hans Roos are both advocates of this view. In the English language literature, this notion of 'Polish delusion' can also be found in Anthony Read and David Fisher's *The Deadly Embrace* and – to some extent – in the work of Anita Prazmowska, who, while justifiably decrying Poland's image as a passive subject of Great Power politics, notes that the country's rulers o [behaved] 'not as helpless victims but as leaders of a Great Power, [… conducting] a complex foreign policy.'[27] Moreover, she argues

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[24] Stanislaw Mackiewicz, *Polityka Becka* [*Beck's Policy*], (Krakow, 2009), 81.

[25] Hanna Maria Giza, 'Ostatnie Lato w Maisons-Laffitte z Jerzym Giedroyciem rozmawia Hanna Maria Giza' ['The last summer in Maison-Lafitte: Hanna Maria Giza talks to Jerzy Giedroyc], *Stacja Naukowa Polskiej Akademii Nauk*, 6, (2003), 76.

[26] Jerzy Lojek, *Agresja 17 wrzesnia 1939. Studium aspektów politycznych* [*The Agression of 17 September 1939. A study of political themes*], (Warszawa, 1990), 16.

[27] Anita Prazmowska, 'Poland' in *The Origins of World War Two: The debate continues*, Robert Boyce and Joseph A Maiolo, (Basignstoke, 2003), 155.

that Poland's 'Great Power' foreign policy was formed completely independently of military considerations. In other words,

> the unthinkable occurred: namely, in what was a military regime the Minister for Foreign Affairs had no clear idea of Poland's military strength and conducted foreign relations separately from important questions of Poland's offensive and defensive capabilities. Conversely, the Commander-in-Chief respected his colleague's control over his ministry and did not attempt to influence him in order to minimise the likelihood of defeat, or to increase the number of allies in the forthcoming war.[28]

This is a simplistic view of the relationship between Beck and Pilsudski's successor as the General Inspector for the Armed Forces, Edward Rydz-Smigly. And, although it is not unreasonable to claim that the initial reason behind the choice of Rydz-Smigly over general Sosnkowski for the post of the General Inspector can be attributed to the ruling elite's conviction that he would not compete with them for power, as the decade progressed, Rydz-Smigly – who became the 'Second Person in the State' by a presidential decree of May 1936 - insisted on becoming increasingly involved in Polish foreign policy.[29] One of the ways in which this manifested itself was his successful opposition to certain promotions and ambassadorial

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[28] Anita Prazmowska, *Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Second World War* (Basignstoke, 2000), 137.

[29] Slawomir Koper, *Zycie prywatne elit Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*The private life of the elites of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2009), 230.

nominations.[30] He was also a member of the National Defence Council, which deliberated on matters such as the Polish response to German demands in Danzig and the Corridor and eventually developed the attitude that 'no important state matter can be decided without me'.[31]

The central focus of his thesis is to demonstrate that Beck and Rydz-Smigly differed significantly in opinions. The Polish policy toward Germany was a particular point of friction, as was both men's attitude towards Marshal Pilsudski's legacy. In addition to these, the Marshal and the Minister disagreed on a range of smaller issues including personnel decisions. They kept their distance, did not socialise with each other and even officially 'made peace' on at least one occasion.[32] And while historians question whether Rydz-Smigly ever developed an alternative diplomatic doctrine, he was widely regarded by contemporaries as Beck's political opposite:[33] a belief evident in the reports written by the diplomats accredited in Warsaw;[34] as well as the failed attempts to topple Beck orchestrated by the French foreign service (probably more ambassador Noel than the Quai d'Orsay) in 1936.[35]

Beck's 'Great Power policy' was also unanimously condemned by Polish post-war historians. A good example is Marek Drozdowski's accusations that 'Beck failed

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30 Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 401.

31 In a written reprimand to Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Ambassador in Rome. Archiwum Akt Nowych (thereafter AAN), Ambasada Rzym/24.

32 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 52.

33 Ryszard Mirowicz, *Edward Rydz-Smigly: Dzialalnosc wojskowa i polityczna* [*Edward Rydz-Smigly: His military and political activity*], (Warszawa, 1988), 143.

34 Kennard's report from 28 December 1936, The National Archives (hereafter TNA, C62562555, FO 371/30760.

35 Juliusz Lukasiewicz, *Dyplomata w Paryzu 1936-1939* [*A Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939]*, (London, 1989), 29; also Mirowicz, *Edward Rydz-Smigly*, 143; and Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 395.

to realistically evaluate the capabilities of the Second Republic on the European stage and attempted to conduct a foreign policy independent of the Great Powers, without taking into account the country's economic and military position. He completely disregarded public opinion.'[36] Invoking public opinion was often used as an argument to evaluate (negatively) the 1934 Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact. Criticised by a large section of public opinion at the time as well as the political opposition, the issue of Nazi-Polish détente remained a key focus in official post-war Polish historiography. Indeed, the orthodox view is that it constituted the crowning example of Beck's 'political blindness'.[37] Using arguments similar to those advocated by Hans Roos and Anita Prazmowska in foreign language historiography, Polish scholars argued that Poland should not have so lightly dismissed the idea of collective security, particularly the Eastern Pact (Franco-Soviet-Czechoslovak-Polish alliance). A tendency to suggest that closer engagement with the Soviet Union was a valid alternative to the Nazi-Polish rapprochement was also widespread and can be seen in the works of Polish communist-era historians such as Jaroslaw Jurkiewicz, Andrzej Micewski and Henryk Batowski. However, documents discovered after the fall of the Soviet Union confirm that the country's leadership never seriously pursued a close alliance with Poland.[38]

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[36] Marek Drozdowski, *Sprawy i Ludzie II Rzeczpospolitej: Szkice i Polemiki* [*People and matters of the Second Polish Republic: Essays and Polemics*], (Krakow, 1979), 37.

[37] Drozdowski, *Sprawy i* ludzie, 371.

[38] See for example, Marek Kornat,'Zwiazek Sowiecki w koncepcjach politycznych Ministra Jozefa Becka' ['The place of the Soviet Union in Minister Beck's political thinking'] and 'Dyplomacja Polska wobec Paktu Ribbentrop-Molotow z 23 sierpnia 1939' ['Polish diplomacy and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939'], both in Kornat, *Polityka Rownowagi*, 153-199 and 426-485; also Anna Cienciala, 'The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 23, 1939: When did Stalin Decide to Align with Hitler, and Was Poland the Culprit?', in Mieczyslaw Biskupski (ed.), *Ideology, Politics and Diplomacy in East-Central Europe* (Rochester, 2003), 147-226. Even historians who are more sympathetic to the foreign policy predicament of the Soviet Union in 1939, argue that British and French intransigence meant that there was no possibility of an 'eastern front' that encompassed Poland: see for instance Michael Jabara Carley, *1939: The Alliance That Never Was*

Nevertheless, pointing out Beck's inability to engage with the Soviet Union remains a valid critique of his policy. Looking at the period during which the 'policy of equilibrium' between Germany and the Soviet Union was in force - from 1934 to 1939 - it is clear that Poland's relationship with Germany was incomparably better than that with the Soviet Union. Conversely, historians continue to criticise Beck's decisions to pay only one official visit to Moscow and to never have met or tried to meet Stalin.[39]

Examining the controversy surrounding the alliance with Russia that never was, one cannot fail to mention the debate over the one that did materialise - the British guarantees extended to Poland in March 1939. While there seems to be a consensus on what motivated the British to 'ally' themselves with Poland – preventing her absorption into the German orbit and deterring Hitler against further expansion – the Polish involvement in the alliance continues to raise controversy.[40] Some scholars, including Anita Prazmowska, argue that Poland's opposition to any Soviet involvement ruled out any hope for a collective security system and with it the possibility of an effective eastern front.[41] Some even believe that the British guarantee to Warsaw encouraged Poland's reckless behaviour in the run up to the war. Critics of this view include Anna Cienciala, who stated that 'the British guarantee […] came a few years to late' to significantly alter the course of events.[42] Some Polish historians vehemently criticise the country's entry into the alliance.

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and the Coming of World War II (New York, 2013).

39 Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 473.

40 Czeslaw Grzelak and Henryk Stanczyk, *Kampania Polska 1939 Roku* [*The Polish Campaign of 1939*], (Warszawa, 2005), 14.

41 Anita Prazmowska, *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front* (Cambridge, 1987), 61.

42 Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers*, 177.

Writers such as Mackiewicz, who described Warsaw's acceptance of the British guarantees as 'mental aberration and an act of madness', see the March declaration as another aspect of the 'Western Betrayal' of Poland.[43]

Interestingly, as this thesis will demonstrate, unlike in their views on Germany and France, Beck and Rydz-Smigly generally agreed on the strategic direction for Poland's relations with both Britain and the Soviet Union. However, in case of the former, their personal conflict and domestic political infighting influenced Warsaw's agenda when dealing with London.

(b) The 'Colonels'

In the period after May 1926, the Polish government consisted of in Seton-Watson words as 'a cast [of] colonels and landowners'.[44] Similarly, Anita Prazmowska states that

> after the coup Pilsudski surrounded himself with a coterie of military men with whom he shared the experiences of the Legions, which he had formed in 1914 to fight for Austria. This group had no political programme to solve Poland's problems. […] The army took over ministries, key administrative posts and industries associated with military production.[45]

Military historians Marian Romeyko and, more recently, Andrzej Misiuk also wrote about an 'exodus from the army' into the civil sphere and the advent of 'politicians in uniforms'. However, unlike Prazowska, who focused on their shared military

[43] Mackiewicz, *Polityka Becka*, 179.
[44] Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe*, 389.
[45] Prazmowska, *Eastern Europe*, 135.

background, Misiuk points to the officials' shared experiences in the military intelligence service. Equipping its members with knowledge of all aspects of government – foreign and interior policy, communication, army, trade and economy – as well as useful contacts, service in Oddzial II[46] allowed for a seamless transfer into civilian administration. Apart from Beck, three of the decade's Prime Ministers (Walery Slawek, Marian Zyndram-Koscialkowski and Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski) also had intelligence experience. This common past had, according to Misiuk, shaped their views on governance and led to the transfer of cloak-and-dagger methods such as 'conspiracy, secrecy, making decisions without wider consultations' into public life.[47]

Expressions such as the 'Colonels' clique, - group or - regime' were coined by opposition writers in the Second Republic and intended to be derogatory. Even at the time, Janusz Jedrzejewicz had criticised them for being 'stupid'; it should be noted that in contemporary Polish writing the 'colonels' clique' appears only in inverted comas. Indeed, much to the dismay of contemporary Polish historians 'Colonel's clique' remains a common term in international historiography – often applied in a blanket manner to the entire period until 1939. Yet, aside form the two above named British examples, these terms can also be found in the historiography and were prevalent in post-war Polish historiography, which attributed the failure of Polish

[46] The body's full name was Oddzial II Sztabu Glownego which can be translated as Section II of the General Staff. Commonly referred to as Oddzial II, the department effectively Poland's intelligence service.

[47] Andrzej Misiuk, *Sluzby Specjalne II Rzeczpospolitej* [*Secret Services in the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 1998), 127-128.

foreign policy to the narrow class origins of the political and military elites.[48] Because the interplay of personalities in the making of civil-military relations is the focus of this thesis, let us look at who they were and where Polish elite came from.

According to Andrzej Garlicki, the main difference between post-May Poland and the other authoritarian systems of the time was Pilsudski's lack of concern that he may be ousted.[49] Surprisingly, no member of the Marshal's entourage ever tried to oust him. However, as secure as his hold on power as he might have been, in the 1930s, Pilsudski was already in his sixties and his health was deteriorating rapidly. Concerned about the future of Poland after his death, he insisted on changing the constitution and started to prepare a group of associates to run the country without him. Zongollowicz's diary gives a first hand impression of the group that surrounded Pilsudski in the early 1930s and, which by and large found itself in charge of the country after the Marshal's death:

> Captain Swirski, Pilsudski's former adjutant, explained to me today that we currently have three governments in Poland – Pilsudski, the Apparent Government with the Prime Minister, and a 'backstage party' – Wyzel-Sciezynski, Switalski, Beck, Miedzinski. The last 'government' – people devoid of ideas, of ideals and seeking promotion and money that would allow them to live the high life. They do not serve anyone but themselves and will sell everyone to always stay afloat. The secret of their apparent closeness with the

[48] Stefania Stanislawska, *Wielka i Mala Polityka Józefa Becka: Marzec – Maj 1938* [*The grand and small policies of Jozef Beck: March – May 1938*], (Warszawa, 1962), 354.
[49] Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne Lata Trzydzieste* [*The Beautiful Thirties*], (Warszawa, 2008), 261.

> Marshal lies in the fact that they immediately pick up not even Pilsudski's thoughts but his beckoning. He does not like to talk too much or explain. In 1926 Beck did not know how to do it and, upon their first meeting, Pilsudski called him an idiot, a fool. But Beck quickly learned his ropes... This is a dreadful clique – of ruffians and drunks, compromising the government and Sejm [the Lower House of Polish Parliament] in 'Adria' [a popular, upmarket nightclub in interwar Warsaw] every night.[50]

As the events of 1935 demonstrated, Piludski's effort to install his hand picked men to follow his legacy as a stable coalition failed – differences in outlook and long hidden ambitions eventually led to fragmentation in the governing camp. The three strongest 'parties' that staked a claim for Pilsudski's 'inheritance' were President Moscicki's 'Castle' clique, the 'Colonels" group – which included a number of Sanacja officials including Janusz Jedrzejewicz, Kazimierz Switalski, Aleksander Prystor, Ignacy Matuszewski, Boguslaw Miedzinski and Józef Beck; who gathered around the Marshall's closest friend, ally and anointed presidential candidate, Walery Slawek – and, later, Rydz-Smigly's coterie. The Slawek clique's cooperation with Moscicki's group resulted in Rydz's election for the post of General Inspector for the Armed Forces. However, soon it became clear that this initial cooperation was to be short-lived. This was because, as mentioned above, despite having backed Mascicki's candidacy for the second term, Pilsudski ultimately planned for Slawek to take on the presidential office. The President was to hold his post until after the

[50] As quoted in Garlicki, *Piekne Lata,* 9-10.

proclamation of the new constitution or the parliamentary election and step down, passing power on to Slawek. In his book on the private lives of the elites of the Second Republic, Slawomir Koper cites a conversation Pilsudski allegedly had with the President shortly after the latter's re-election. The Marshal reportedly told Moscicki that 'Slawek should replace him when he feels tired'.[51] An election was scheduled for September 1935 but the persecuted opposition parties called for a boycott. Unfortunately for the regime, the public listened to the opposition's pleas - overall, less than half (45.9 per cent) of those eligible voted – in Warsaw less than a third (29.4 per cent).[52] This constituted a major defeat for the government thus further contributing to the already deepening internal crisis within the Sanacja camp. Defying everyone's expectations, Moscicki did not even contemplate resignation. Instead when, following the election, Prime Minister Slawek presented him with the customary letter of resignation, Moscicki accepted it. Apparently, even the public was surprised by Moscicki's decision – while old Pilsudskites were positively livid. Having forged an alliance with the increasingly powerful Rydz-Smigly and aided by Slawek's lack of desire to fight him – Moscicki had managed to successfully eliminate 'the Colonels'.[53]

(c) The Ambassadors

As one might expect, the course of the Second World War inflicted significant damage on Polish military's and Foreign Ministry's archives. Prior to their evacuation in mid-September 1939, the Polish authorities destroyed part of their

[51] Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 309.
[52] Garlicki, *Piekne Lata*, 264.
[53] Slawek was traumatised by the loss of his friend and mentor Pilsudski, and seemed unable to run a country on his own.

archive. In addition to that, many documents perished in war-torn Poland or were seized and subsequently misplaced by the invading German and Russian forces. Fortunately for historians, however, many of Poland's diplomats managed to safeguard their private papers and some public documents. This thesis's focus on the nuanced relationships within the Polish leadership makes diplomatic memoirs and private collections an extremely valuable source. Thus, it is important to spend some time reviewing the available published material on Poland's key interbellum ambassadors. On 1 September 1939 Poland had embassies in Washington, London, Rome, Ankara, Paris, the Vatican, Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo and Bucharest. And, as much as Beck might have preferred to keep his ambassadors at a distance, they were obviously instrumental to the conduct of his foreign policy.

Józef Lipski, who served as Ambassador in Berlin for almost a decade was, like Beck for the Ministry, handpicked for the job by Pilsudski. The Marshal appreciated his character and was certain that Lipski would be an effective agent of his policies.[54] A.J.P. Taylor's anecdotal revelations about Lipski's conduct during the last days of peace to some extent corresponded with Beck's 'Black Legend'.[55] Most historians, however, regard Lipski as a highly competent diplomat who was instrumental in the signing of the 1934 Non-Aggression Pact. Lipski's private papers indicate that he later became aware of the danger facing Poland from Germany and continued to act

[54] Bogdan Grzelonski, 'Poslowie i Ambasadorzy II RP w Latach 1919-1945' ['Envoys and Ambassadors of the Second Polish Republic between 1919 and 1945'], *Polski Przeglad Dyplomatyczny*, 4 (26), (2005), 129.

[55] According to A.J.P. Taylor, Lipski refused to cooperate with his British and French colleagues as they scrambled to appease Hitler and did not want to help facilitate Beck's visit to Berlin to negotiate the return Danzig the status of the Corridor. Worse of all, he apparently had the audacity to ignore Ambassador Henderson's last-minute, middle-of-the night calls to maintain dialogue with the German authorities. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, (London, 2001), 329 -334.

in the nation's best interest.[56] One of the most recent attempts to demonstrate that is Marek Kornat's analysis of Lipski's various papers.[57] D.C. Watt is similarly complimentary. Writing about Lipski's conduct following the Munich conference he commended on his imperviousness to German threats:

> Throughout the disastrous year […] he remained unperturbed, in control, unflappable. He regarded the maintenance of good relations with Germany as of the utmost importance for his country [.... and] was prepared to use the unstable personalities that made up the Nazi leadership, to flatter their pride and show concern for their susceptibilities. He was not, however, at any time ready to compromise the sovereign rights and honour of his country. He was to need all his courage, control, urbanity and determination to give nothing away in the negotiations which were to follow.[58]

Ambassadors Lukaszewicz and Raczynski have also left memoirs and extensive personal archives. Juliusz Lukasiewicz's papers have been published, as were some of Edward Raczynski's. Moreover, the latter's biography is presently being written by Krzysztof Kania.

Slawomir Koper employs an apparently light-hearted but informative approach to

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[56] Jozef Lipski's private papers were published after the war. Waclaw Jedrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939. Papers and Memoirs of Jozef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland*, (New York, 1968).

[57] Marek Kornat, 'Ambasador Jozef Lipski o stosunkach polsko-niemieckich (1933-1939)' ['Ambassador Jozef Lipski on Polish-German relations (1933-1939)'], *The Polish Diplomatic Review*, 1 (5) (2002), 199-226.

[58] Watt, *How War Came*, 64-65.

the Second Republic's key political figures in his recent book *Zycie prywatene elit Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej*. He depicts politicians such as Rydz, Slawek, Wieniawa, Moscicki and Pilsudski through the relationships and friendships they formed, their military service, and the period they lived in. Its nightlife, entertainment, duels and code of honour – provide the background to Beck's May 5th speech in which the Minister famously refused German demands for an extraterritorial corridor through Pomerania. Andrzej Garlicki's *Piekne lata trzydzieste* serves a similar purpose. This volume, which includes extended versions of some previously published articles as well as new texts, explores among other topics Pilsudski's attempts to subordinate the Sejm, the detention of the opposition in camps at Brzesc and Bereza Kartuska, and the problem of anti-Semitism among students.

Taken together, these monographs, memoirs and unpublished papers provide a valuable insight into the personal relationships among the decision-making elite, and thus constitute a valuable source for this thesis.

(ii) Military preparedness in 1939:

The last historiographical theme explored in this introduction is Polish military preparedness. Prazmowska argues that in the period preceding the war, 'the Poles over-estimated their military prowess, under-estimated the German Army and finally ignored the possibility of Germany and the Soviet Union coming together.'[59] Valid though that conclusion may be, Prazmowska fails to mention that the last criticism

[59] Prazmowska, *Eastern Europe*, 152.

could be applied equally to Britain and, to a lesser extent, France.[60] This thesis will evaluate all three of Prazmowska's criticisms and cast fresh light on each of her arguments. It will specifically examine if there was a link between the Western denial of the possibility of a Soviet-German pact and the Polish military's abandonment of the R+N (USSR + Germany or Rosja + Niemcy in Polish) defence plans it drew in 1920s.

The argument about Poland's overestimation of her military capability may stem from a number of factors. First of all, the controversy regarding 'nine German divisions', a phrase reportedly used by Beck during a meeting in 1939 where he outlined his foreign policy strategy for the coming months.[59] Trying to explain this grossly inaccurate estimate, Jan Weinstein came up with two hypotheses. Beck might have been referring to 1938, when the Chief of Czechoslovak General Staff, General Kreijci, decided to order a partial mobilisation in response to information that eight to ten German divisions had concentrated near the border in Saxony. Alternatively, the number might have originated in the Western press, which reported that the acquisition of Prague on 15 March 1939 was carried out by approximately one hundred and twenty thousand soldiers – the equivalent of between nine and ten divisions.[61]

Unlike most historians, Weinstein does not put the number down to an

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[60] Donald Cameron Watt, 'An Intelligence Surprise: The Failure of the Foreign Office to Anticipate the Nazi-Soviet Pact', *Intelligence and National Security*, 4/3 (1989), 512-534; Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace: Intelligence and Policy Making 1933-1939* (Oxford, 2001), 371-373.

[61] Zaranski, *Diariusz*, 715.

intelligence failure. A negative view of military intelligence (Oddzial II) features prominently in the works of military historians writing about the coming of the war. Their criticism is usually three-fold: (1) a perceived lack of communication between Foreign Ministry and the General Staff; (2) unfortunate staffing decisions – primarily the replacement of experienced Colonel Tadeusz Pelczynski with colonel Jozef Smolenski – a novice; and (3) a belief that the Soviet Union did not pose an immediate danger to Poland.[62] Nevertheless, a successful critique of this view can, and has, been made on the bases that it relies on the findings of the two investigative commissions set up by the Polish government in exile, which of course had axes to grind against their predecessors. 'The new governing "crew",' writes Marek Kornat of the first Registration Commission, 'were determined to find materials to discredit the government of 1939, a purpose served first by the Registration Office within the Ministry for Military Affairs and later the Registration Commission, which was officially headed by General Józef Haller but in effect run by the deputy minister General Modelski – who was deeply involved in the 'one sided policy of [settling political scores]'.[63]

The opening of the surviving Polish military archives in 1970s led to a surge in literature on the functioning of Polish intelligence services in Germany. This included Wladyslaw Kozaczuk's *Bitwa o tajemnice,* which focused on the shallow intelligence and counter-intelligence work of regional Oddzial II outposts in Bydgoszcz and Katowice. Mieczyslaw Cieplewicz and Marian Zgorniak published a collection of intelligence documents regarding the Polish knowledge of German war

[62] Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 139; Misiuk, *Sluzby Specjalne*, 79.
[63] Ibid., 139.

preparations; and Leszek Gondek prepared the first comprehensive study of intelligence on Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1939. The historical view on intelligence began to change. Ten years ago, in his monograph on secret services, Andrzej Misiuk evaluated Oddzial II very positively. He noted the ability of its Western division to correctly estimate the quantitative strength of the German army, guess directions of future attack and warn about German plans to occupy Prague.[64] He too, however, criticised the staffing decisions made in 1939 by the General Staff. Henryk Cwiek, on the other hand, focused on the lack of cooperation between the wider General Staff and Oddzial II, showing that the relationship between the consumers and producers of military intelligence in Poland was dysfunctional.[65]

Memoirs of former intelligence officers likewise give a mixed view of the service. On one hand, Polish agents were very skilled: Major Zychon, one of the Polish 'Intelligence Aces', believed that Poland had the best intelligence on Germany in the world during the second half of the 1930s.[66] Yet the decision makers seemingly ignored this excellent intelligence. Both the Military Attaché in Berlin Antoni Szymanski and Jan Dlugolecki felt that their reports had no effect on either the General Staff or Foreign Ministry.[67]

Another criticism, commonly voiced in particular by international historians, is of

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64 Misiuk, *Sluzby Specjalne*, 79.

65 Henryk Cwiek, *Przeciw Abwehrze* [*Against the Abwehr*], (Warszawa, 2001), 175-6. For a more general discussion of the importance of a good consumer-producer relationship in intelligence, see Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge, 2007), 240-256 and 289-29; and Robert Jervis, 'What's wrong with the intelligence process?,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, 1 (1) (1986), 28–41.

66 Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 140.

67 Antonii Szymanski, *Zly Sasiad. Niemcy 1932-1939 w oswietleniu polskiego attache wojskowego w Berlinie* [*Bad neighbour. Germany 1932-1939 remembered by the Polish military attaché in Berli*n], (London, 1959), 128-8.

Poland's conviction that her Western allies would not allow her to fall.[68] However, in a report sent to the Foreign Office in January 1939, Ambassador Howard Kennard stated that Beck based his foreign policy on the assumption that neither Britain nor France was ready to help Poland in the event of further German expansion in Central Europe.[69] Having seemingly secured British support and being a French ally there was no reason why Poland should fear abandonment. Yes, the British did not rush to clarify the terms of the alliance and agreed to significantly lower armaments loan than they first intimated; and equally yes, the French High Command did not believe effective defence of Poland would be possible without Soviet support but the French had, in the end, agreed to start immediate air assistance and a mobilisation three days after the German attack.[70] Given the much greater force and technological superiority enjoyed by the Germans it seemed natural that the short term Polish defence plan should focus on holding up the German attack until allied help could be provided. Unlike Prazmowska's and Taylor's view that the British were 'conned' into guaranteeing Poland's independence, the prevailing opinion among Polish historians is that Britain 'knowingly wrote Poland a bouncing cheque'.[71]

All the above-mentioned issues are, in fact, parts of a much greater problem: that

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[68] Prazmowska, *Eastern Europe*, 152.

[69] Marek Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop-Molotow: Problem zblizenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczpospolitej* [*1939 Poland and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact: The idea of a German-Soviet détente in the foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2002), 242.

[70] Szeremietiew, *Czy moglismy przetrwac*, 318.

[71] Grzelak and Stanczyk, *Kampania polska*, 14; this view is shared by Halik Kochanski who points out that not only Poland's British and French allies, but also the Americans, were familiar with Warsaw's defence plans and that 'the Poles were under the impression that the British and French understood their plan and the absolute necessity of mounting an effective offensive.' Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*, (London, 2012), 55.

of the conflict over threat perception among the Polish political and military elites. A much-understudied topic – no doubt due to its complexity and the lack of a complete Polish archive – but fascinating and much needed if we are ever to fully understand the events leading to the war. The only historian who has looked at this issue is Roman Wapinski, whose two papers focused on the psychological factors and preconceptions that had influenced different Polish policy makers between 1921 and 1939. Wapinski based his interpretation on the political and military leadership's attitude to a possible German-Soviet détente, which, while being an interesting case study, provides a limited picture. Indeed, in his analysis, Wapinski wanted to discover the connection between beliefs, preconceptions and threat perception among the political elites but rejects the idea of a link between these and military planning and defence tactics employed in September 1939. Moreover, no consideration is given to the topic that is the central focus of this thesis, namely the poor inter-personal relationship between Minister Beck and Marshal Rydz-Smigly and the effect it may have had on German threat perception among Polish political and military elites.[72]

I began this introduction by noting that while it is impossible to write about the origins of Second World War without Poland, the country often receives no more

[72] Roman Wapinski, 'Rezultat kalkulacji czy chciejstwa? Kwestia wspoldzialania Niemiec I ZSRR przed 17 wrzesnia 1939 w wyobrazeniach polskich srodowisk przywodczych' ['Calculation or wishful thinking? The question of Soviet-German cooperation as seen by the Polish military and political leadership'] in Henryk Batowski (ed.), *17 wrzesnia 1939: Materialy z Ogolnopolskiej Konferencji Historykow* [*17 September 1939: Materials from a Polish Historians' Conference*], (Krakow, 1994), 75-90; also Roman Wapinski, 'Wzajemne oddzialywanie polityki zagranicznej i wewnetrznej Polski wiosna i latem 1939 r.' ['The interdependence of Polish domestic and international policies in spring and summer of 1939'], *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 24 (1-2), (1992), 39-58.

than a superficial mention. Even elaborate monographs are not immune to oversimplification and can harbour a number of preconceptions. This was certainly the case with Polish language literature written in the period of Communist rule, between 1948 and 1989. Historians of that period cultivated a negative image of the 1930s and laid the blame for September 1939 on the Sanacja government in general and the Foreign Affairs Minister Jozef Beck in particular. They strongly criticised his policy of rapprochement with Germany and, unsurprisingly, his negative attitude to the Soviet Union.

Western scholarship has, on the whole, shared some similarities with the post-war Polish one, with a tendency to portray Beck in an unequivocally bad light and focus on his attempts to pursue a 'Great Power' diplomatic policy from a position of weakness. Anna Cienciala and Piotr Wandycz have long challenged this approach. They reject the anti-Beck view dominant in the Cold War era literature and instead advocate a more balanced - although in no way apologetic - view of Beck and Polish foreign policy throughout 1930s. The belief that Beck chose the only path available to him is also prevalent in current Polish historical debate.

An analysis of the historiography demonstrates a certain pattern in the available literature. When writing about the coming of the war, military historians stress the lack of sufficient communication between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the General Staff and the intelligence service. This point is rarely raised in diplomatic histories, which instead focus on the 'militarisation of the political life'. There is of course truth in both accounts but if one considers them separately one looses sight of a bigger problem – the interconnectedness between foreign policy, threat perception

and war planning. To say that soldiers dominated the government elite is not a good enough explanation on its own and neither is complaining that the communication between the Government and the General Staff was strained. Surprisingly, the vast literature on Poland and the coming of the war still lacks a comprehensive analysis of what this multi-tiered relationship really was.

This study *does not argue* that, had the civil-military relationship been better, the outcome of the September 1939 campaign would have in the end been different. Even perfect civil-military relations would not have overcome the vast disparity between Germany's and Poland's armed forces. It does, however, claim that the dissonance between the diplomats and the armed forces, which resulted in a foreign policy that did not correspond with Poland's military strength, hampered the country's ability to defend itself. Assertively presenting itself as a major regional player whose large army could temporarily withstand assault encouraged a degree of complacency not just in Warsaw but also among Poland's allies. The connection between threat perception and foreign policy is crucial for understanding the processes culminating in the outbreak of the Second World War and should receive greater scholarly attention. Luckily, the abundance of published and archival materials – memoirs, notes, letters, sometimes even official reports – that shed light on Polish policy making process and the nature of the civil-military relationship should, no doubt lead to this gap being filled. This thesis aspired to make a contribution to that historiographical process.

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Methods and sources

Scholars investigating the Polish government in exile or the Polish Armed Forces in the Second World War can be confident that they will be able to access complete collections of relevant documents stored in the Sikorski Institute in London. A researcher working on a project related to pre-war Poland enjoys no such comfort. Earlier in this chapter, I alluded to the tumultuous history of the Polish military and civilian archives. Many of the Polish documents from the 1920s and 1930s perished forever during the war and those that survived are scattered in archives around the world. This situation was apparent to surviving Pilsudskites, who began to worry about being written out of history immediately after the war. Indeed, in a letter from 12 January 1946 to Ignacy Matuszewski, Boguslaw Miedzinski, the former Speaker of the Sejm and editor in chief of the Pilsudskite *Gazeta Polska* newspaper, wrote:

> Like a toothache one cannot stop thinking about, a disconcerting thought keeps gnawing at my mind. The current state of affairs might lead to stupid and blatant falsification of Polish history of the last 35 years. We are in danger of having our history (re)written by Wanda Wasilewska and [Stanislaw] Kot to the point when any objective future historian would struggle to find sufficient material to uncover the truth. There are still a few of us left in this world, who could put together our collective knowledge and memories and write an honest account of the period between 1910 and 1945 – the story of our generation. Or we could at least gather materials

> which would aid researchers. I cannot but think this our duty towards the future, or perhaps the past and all our fallen.[73]

Therefore, to address the incompleteness of the document archives in Poland, and to answer the questions asked in this doctoral thesis, my research made use of Polish and foreign archival materials available in archives in Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The available sources are reviewed below and a detailed collection index is provided in Appendix I at the back of this thesis.

(i) Polish-language sources

In the course of my research, I have found that there are fewer Polish documents in Poland than abroad. The Warsaw-based Archiwum Akt Nowych and Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe hold a number of governmental (AAN) and military (CAW) papers relevant to this research. Archiwum Akt Nowych stores part of the archive of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, whereas Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe holds the files of the Polish General Staff (out of these the collections of Oddzial I, Oddzial II and Oddzial IV are of particular relevance to this research), materials from the office of the Minister of Military Affairs, papers of the Air Force and Armoured Weapons Commands, the Procurement Office files and assorted officers' papers.[74]

In addition, Biblioteka im. Ossolinskich in Wroclaw holds two interesting

[73] Boguslaw Miedzinski's letter to Ignacy Matuszewski, 12 January 1946, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina* Zes. 103/34.

[74] Created by Pilsudski to protect the Armed Forces from political interference, the complicated system of dual command, different in peace- and war-time, proved counter-productive as muddled lines of responsibility and lack for personal and institutional accountability complicated decision-making. For an explanation the organizational structure of the General Inspectorate for the Armed Forces and the General Staff see Chapter Two, pages 96 - 99.

collections of private papers. One by Ambassador Alfred Wysocki (the Polish representative in Berlin and Rome), the other by the second most senior officer in the Polish Armed Forces, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski. I found these collections extremely useful in understanding the institutional structures at the time and the broader historical backdrop of the events examined in this thesis.

The two Polish archives in London, the Jozef Pilsudski Institute and the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (PISM) together boast more 1930s Polish documents than collections in Poland itself. The Sikorski Institute stores the complete archive of the Polish Embassy in London, part of the archive of the Foreign Affairs Ministry and private papers of ambassadors Edward Raczynski and Jozef Lipski, minister Jan Szembek, colonel Antonii Szymanski and colonel Jan Emisarski. What is more, PISM also holds the statements, testimonials and minutes for and by the Winiarski Commissions of (investigating the causes of the September 1939 defeat) and Registration Commission of 1940. However, although these two collections consist of much interesting material, the context of political recrimination in which the testimonials were produced requires historians to approach them with a sceptical eye.

The second Polish archive in London, the Jozef Pilsudski Institute (JPI-London), is a European outpost of the Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America (JPIoA) based in New York. Unlike PISM, the JPI holds relatively few official papers focusing, instead on private collections. JPI-London, while small, is home to the files of Jozef Beck, Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Tadeusz Pelczynski, Ludwik Lubienski and Stefan Meyer. Whereas JPIoA keeps the papers of the Becks, Roman Debicki, brothers

Jedrzejewicz, President Ingacy Moscicki, general Jaklicz, Norbert Fethke, Ambassador Janusz Lukasiewicz, Kazimierz Switalski, Jan Weinstein, Jerzy Niezbrzycki, Major Witold Langenfeld and the surviving fragments of Marshal Rydz-Smigly's private archive.

In addition to the materials outlined above, a large number of Polish intelligence files are reportedly held in the State Archive of the Russian Federation. The Red Army seized these documents during the Second World War. Access to them however is severely restricted, and I was unable to gain assured access to them during the course of my doctorate at King's College London.

(ii) Foreign documents and published primary sources

As we see from the outline above, Polish-language sources are fragmented and incomplete. Therefore, in addition to Polish documents, this research will also draw on a number of foreign, particularly British, materials. Foreign Office (FO 371, 417, 688, 404 and 954/19B) and Cabinet Papers (CAB 63, 65/1, 66/1-3 and 81-88) collections available in the Public Records Office provide valuable background information about the Polish internal affairs.

This thesis will also make use of published memoirs of political (e.g. Jadwiga Beck, Jozef Lipski, Edward Raczynski, Jan Szembek, Pawel Starzenski) and military (e.g. Colonel Antonii Szymanski) figures, where these are available. Unfortunately, neither of the main subjects of this study left a memoir or diary. Jozef Beck never kept a diary while Marshal Rydz-Smigly's one was stolen during the violent burglary in 1951 into his widow Marta's house.

Organisation and Structure

The breakdown of relations between Jozef Beck and Edward Rydz-Smigly, was a gradual process and I have reflected this in the structure of this thesis. After an introductory chapter explaining the background of Jozef Pilsudski's May 1926 coup and an exposition of the key people featured in this thesis, the narrative follows a chronological order and starts in the spring of 1935 – just as Poland's defacto dictator (and, recall, Beck's mentor) Marshal Jozef Pilsudski died. His death opened a power vacuum which gradually eroded the political influence of nearly all of the 'Colonels' – men associated with Pilsudski's First World War Polish Legion – save for Beck himself. This process was more or less complete by the middle of 1936, when we begin to see the first signs of ideological disagreements between Beck and Rydz-Smigly. These were caused by the latter's elevation into Marshaldom and increased involvement in foreign policy making following his diplomatic success of signing the Franco-Polish military agreement at Rambouillet.

The interpersonal conflict grew more acute as time went on and began turning into a broader, political and civil-military conflict in 1937 when Rydz-Smigly attempted to strengthen his position through an alliance with the Polish Right. Indeed, this thesis shows that far from being the 'quiet year' 1937 is sometimes seen as, Poland's internal developments at the time were in fact instrumental for understanding some of Warsaw's most controversial political moves in 1938. Including its ultimatums to both Kovno and Prague and its initial response to German territorial demands.

The consequences of the dysfunctional relationship between the civil and military decision makers came to head in 1939 when Poland faced the direct threat of

German aggression are examined in the final chapter of this paper. It focuses on the first eight months of 1939 that tested both Beck's and Rydz's political and decision making agility and found both men lacking.

Chapter One: *May 1926*

On 12 May 1926, Jozef Pilsudski left his manor house in Sulejowek, a gift from his former soldiers, at 7 am. He was going to Warsaw and before he left, he assured Aleksandra – his wife – that he would be back by 3 o'clock – just in time for dinner. It may seem like a quotidian conversation but Poland's First Marshal was not travelling to the nearby capital on business or for a spot of shopping – he was going to overthrow the government.

Pilsudski, the victor of the 1920 Battle of the Vistula, withdrew from public life in 1923 and lived a life out of the public eye, his purdah occasionally punctuated by writing and the odd public lecture. He would, from time to time, receive old friends and former subordinates who relayed to him the goings on or news from the capital. The Marshal listened, and did not like what he heard. In the mid-1920s, Poland suffered from a number of social and political ills, including the Polish-German customs war that broke out in 1925 further destabilised the fragile post-war Polish economy. Against the backdrop of rising unemployment and still higher inflation levels, strikes and riots became relatively common. The fifth government since the November 1922 Parliamentary election headed by Prime Minister Skrzynski was unable to stop the disturbances and resigned on 5 May 1926, one week before Pilsudski's coup. Skrzynski was succeeded by Wincenty Witos, leader of the Peasant Movement and one of the key personalities in the dominant Centre-Right coalition. This would be the third, and last, time he would be asked to form a cabinet.

No love was ever lost between Witos and Pilsudski. Even before formally assuming office, the new PM attacked the Marshal in a newspaper interview. He planned, he told the reporter, to fire all Pilsudskite district prefects.[75] Worse still, Witos wanted to replace General Lucjan Zeligowski, a devout adherent of the Marshal's, with General Juliusz Malczewski. Schooled at the Imperial Austrian Military Academy, Malczewski epitomised the antithesis of a Pilsudskite officer. He was old, right wing and he had not served in either the secret para-military Polish Military Organisation founded by Pilsudski or the Great War Polish Legion led by him. Worst of all, he was bound to interfere with the structure of Pilsudski's beloved Army.[76] The Marshal responded in his trademark robust style. Talking to *Polska Zbrojna* [*Armed Poland*], he accused the government of deliberately trying to 'destroy the morale of the Polish Army', corruption and dirty tricks.[77] He left a parting shot full of menace. He promised to 'attack the main evil of this country, which is its domination by political parties which care nothing for the nation and whose members are only intent upon graft.' [78] Unsurprisingly, the Witos administration confiscated the newspaper's print-run.

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[75] Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate 1918-1939*, (New York, 1979), 217.

[76] During his previous premiership, between 28 May and 14 December 1923, Witos had already started dismantling the dual structure of command put in place by Pilsudski when Commander in Chief.

[77] Pilsudski believed that he had been spied on by the previous Witos administration: 'I was surrounded by paid spies and they [the Witos government] bribed with money or promotions everyone that betrayed me – the former commander in chief!' Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 217.

[78] Pilsudski's disenchantment with political parties could be traced back to the politically motivated killing of Poland's first President Gabriel Narutowicz on 16 December 1922. He blamed it on militant partisanship and was disgusted by the reverence with which the assassin – Eligiusz Niewiadomski – was treated by the National Democrats.

The Upheaval

Pilsudski expected his coup to be a formality. He gathered very few troops, no more than two thousand soldiers, but was convinced firstly, that cowardly Witos would give in under the slightest pressure, and moreover that the Army would refuse to stand against its Marshal. His first assumption was correct, Witos did indeed panic. But fortunately for the government, President Stanislaw Wojciechowski, Pilsudski's old friend, was determined to defend the principles of democracy and took command. The Marshal's second assumption, on the other hand, proved completely wrong. When his troops attempted to cross the Vistula into central Warsaw they found their way blocked. A number of units remained loyal to the government and were ready to open fire on Pilsudski's insurrectionist force.

The ensuing confrontation on the Poniatowski Bridge drew President Wojciechowski into discussions with the Marshal but his conversation with Pilsudski yielded no results. Civil war seemed imminent as when the insurgents eventually entered the capital through a different crossing, combat broke out. Throughout the day Pilsudski's forces would make advances only to be pushed back by the loyalist troops. Reinforcements were sent for but unfortunately for Premier Witos and President Wojciechowski, the Left feeling marginalised by the Centre-Right had by then decided to throw its lot with Pilsudski.[79] The Unions called a general strike with immediate effect. Military trains carrying loyalist soldiers were shunted into sidings but the ones carrying troops sent to aid Pilsudski by rogue military commanders were allowed to pass. They reached Warsaw early on 14 May and attacked loyalist positions including the Belvedere, where the President and the government were

[79] Pilsudski originally sprung up from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS).

gathered. Later that day, under covering fire provided by a rump of their forces, the loyalist leadership managed to escape to the leafy suburb of Wilanow from where, at approximately 7 pm, they petitioned for a ceasefire. Premier Witos, President Wojciechowski and the cabinet all resigned. The Presidency passed on to Maciej Rataj, the Speaker of the Sejm, who travelled to Wilanow to conclude ceasefire terms accompanied by one of the main subjects of this doctoral thesis, colonel Jozef Beck.

The very next day, in accordance with Pilsudski's wishes, interim President Rataj named Kazimierz Bartel as the new Prime Minister whose government of technocrats assumed responsibility immediately. As the Marshal did not call an early parliamentary election, the last act of his coup was the presidential election scheduled for 31 May 1926.[80] Pilsudski won a landslide but, in a successful attempt to humiliate the Sejm, refused to accept his nomination.[81] The revolution was complete. Four days later Ignacy Moscicki, a chemist, assumed the presidency with Pilsudski's blessing and the new administration embarked on a programme of political change engineered by the Marshal who once again assumed the command of the Armed Forces.

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[80] The Polish President was not elected directly by poplar vote but by the National Assembly, which combined membership of both Houses of Parliament.

[81] Apparently some took this refusal as an indication that Pilsudski wanted to become Poland's new monarch. According to journalist Waclaw Zbyszewski, one of his foreign colleagues, a *New York Times* correspondent called Floyd was most insistent on meeting the Marshal and finding out if he intended to become King. Waclaw A. Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o ludziach i czasach przedwojennych*, [*Stories of pre-War times and people*], (Warszawa, 2000), 29.

'The Decisive Factor'[82]

The events described in this thesis take place after Marshal Pilsudski's death in 1935, but in order to understand the political reality of the late 1930s Poland the reader must understand the processes which created Sanacja – the Pilsudskite autocracy or, to use the Marshal's own term 'controlled democracy'.[83] To aid this, I have briefly explained the events of Poland's coup d'état and will now look at some of the legislative and organisational changes enacted by Pilsudski.[84] These will include the formation of the regime's own political party, the promulgation of a new constitution and the development of a new military command structure.

Although Pilsudski did not at first try to exact revenge on his political opponents, and allowed the Sejm's current term to run its course, constant parliamentary obstruction made him hanker for a party that would be sympathetic to him. Thus, in January 1927, the Marshal, then also Prime Minister, entrusted his old associate Walery Slawek with the task of putting together a 'party'. The use of inverted comas is deliberate. The Non-Party Bloc of Cooperation with the Government (BBWR) was obviously not a traditional political party.[85] Rather, it was a loose and diverse grouping of people who agreed with Pilsudskite principles. BBWR's members

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[82] Parliamentarian's Bernard Singer's moniker for Pilsudski. Andrzej Garlicki. 'Przeciwnikow zamknac, wybory wygrac' ['Election must be won, opposition locked up'], *Polityka*, 36 (2005), 70.

[83] See Jozef Potocki's report about his conversation with the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. Jozef Potocki, Polish Ambassador in Washington, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 15 Dec. 1937, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (thereafter abbreviated to PISM) A.12/49/6II.

[84] Although the casualties were minimal, historians disagree on the actual number. Richard Watt writes about 371 casualties and 918 injuries. Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 232 Whereas Andrzej Garlicki mentions 379 casualties and 920 injuries. Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne lata trzydzieste* [*The beautiful Thirties*], (Warszawa, 2008), 11.

[85] The name was commonly abbreviated to BBWR and this name will be hereafter used throughout this thesis.

ranged from large landowners and industrialists to Socialists many of who still belonged to the Polish Socialist Party. Indeed, the BBWR did not require new joiners to relinquish previous party affiliations.

Pilsudski's surprising benevolence towards his political opponents extended to the lower officer ranks. He did, however, use the coup as an opportunity to purge the Army of those long hostile to him. These were usually older officers who had started their careers in the Austrian or Tsarist armies. Thus, while in 1924 there were 143 generals in the Polish Army, by 1932 there were only 27 left and 22 out of these were former Great War Legionaries.[86] In his bid to 'rejuvenate' the officer corps, the Marshal also increasingly promoted his former subordinates to key military posts.[87] By 1932, 71 per cent of all regional Army Inspectors came from Pilsudski's Legion, a 43 per cent increase from 1924.[88]

In addition to introducing personnel changes, Pilsudski also vigorously took to reversing the changes introduced in the military by his predecessor General Sikorski and further remodeled the command structure. First of all, he ordered the creation of the post of the General Inspector of the Armed Forces – a wartime commander in chief – which came in the aftermath of the August 1926 constitutional Amendments.[89] Jozef Pilsudski naturally became the first General Inspector and, as

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[86] 12 generals died but the remaining 104 were retired from service. Mieczyslaw Jablonowski, *Ministrowie Spraw Wojskowych 1918-1944: z badan nad polityka wojskowa Polski* [*Ministers for Military Affairs, 1918-1944: A study of Polish military policy*], (Pultusk, 2005), 162.

[87] Compared to 1924, in 1932, the average general's age dropped from 48.6 years to 40.9. Jablonowski, *Ministrowie Spraw Wojskowych*, 162.

[88] Ibid., 162.

[89] The Amendments gave the President power to decide all matters of national defence not mentioned in the constitution by decree countersigned by the Minister of Military Affairs. The

he was already the Minister for Military Affairs, the Marshal was now able to exercise unchallenged control over the military both in peace and war, and influence foreign policy. Of course, this had both a good and a bad side. The bad was that Pilsudski's personal agenda and preconceptions ruled out objective strategic thinking. The somewhat better? Pilsudski's authority kept the military free from political interferences other than his own.

Immediately after the May 'Upheaval,' Poland's constitution was effectively suspended. [90] Indeed, the above-mentioned August Amendments provided a temporary legal framework, while work on a new constitution got under way. The April Constitution of 1935 that was passed through the Assembly just weeks before Jozef Pilsudski's death greatly strengthened the executive. To raise the President's prestige in preparation for his new role, the Marshal emphasised presidential control over the armed forces, thus ensuring the army's independence from parliamentary pressures.

By combining the two offices of head state and foreign affairs, the Marshal also became his own deputy, which, considering his personality and work style, must have suited him well. Working for Pilsudski was not an easy task. On the contrary, he was a difficult and somewhat moody boss. As Richard Watt notes:

> Pilsudski was extremely secretive. He kept no diary nor did he keep one person informed of his plans. Instead he discussed bits and pieces of various programs with a number of aides who were then

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first such decree published on 6 August 1926, named the President Commander in Chief in peace time (position to be exercised by proxy by the Minister of Military Affairs) and the General Inspector of the Armed Forces in wartime.

[90] Known as the March Constitution, from the month it was passed in 1921.

left to try to put the whole together in conversations among themselves.[91]

Later in this thesis we will see that many of these bad habits would be adopted by Pilsudski's erstwhile aides.[92] This group of intimates was made up of people who participated on the Marshal's side in the struggle for independence and were now either active or reserve officers of the Polish Army. Of roughly the same age and united in their worship of their 'Commandant', the men were often regarded as a monolith and given a designation inspired by the military rank many of them had in common – 'the Colonels' clique.'[93] For the first two years after the coup – until the first post-May parliamentary election – Marshal Pilsudski kept his 'Colonels' quite close, intending he said to 'teach his subordinates statesmanship'.[94]

He was only half joking. Although he professed his dislike for 'politicians in uniforms', with the 1928 election out of the way, Pilsudski began the 'militarisation' of public life.[95] This process occurred in two stages. First, many senior officers were

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[91] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 269.

[92] Even though his successor as Marshal, Edward Rydz-Smigly had not worked very closely with Pilsudski after the Polish-Bolshevik war, he too shared many of his mannerisms. According to his Chief of General Staff, general Stachiewicz: '[Rydz-Smigly's] decisions and directives regarding planning and order giving, did not, usually go beyond 'the immediate'. He didn't want to disclose his intentions prematurely and thus, (…) one had to 'drag' long term plans out of him and even them his remarks were minimal – imprecise and indirect. General remarks intended for his closest collaborators rather than those who were to implement them later.' Quoted in Roman Wapinski, *Polityka i Politycy: o polskiej scenie politycznej XX wieku* [*The Politics and Politicians: Comments on the Polish political scene in the 20th Century*], (Wroclaw, 2006), 137.

[93] Reverence towards Pilsudski was generally widespread within the army. When Mieczyslaw Niedzialkowski, the editor in chief of socialist *Robotnik* allowed for publication of articles accusing Pilsudski of financial misgivings a group of officer applied for their superior's permission to 'do him in'. They were denied but the soldiers were allowed to beat the journalist up 'if they make it clear that the whooping is connected to the allegations.' Kordian Zamorski, *Dzienniki (1930- 1938)* [*Diaries (1930-1939)*], (Warszawa, 2011), 42.

[94] Jadwiga Beck, *Kiedy bylam ekscelencja* [*When I was an Excellency*], (Warszawa, 1990), 31.

[95] Although he himself combined governmental responsibilities with military duties, Pilsudski did not want to set a precedent. In his memoir, Waclaw Jedrzejewicz recorded a 1928 conversation with the Marshal who though his future successor as General Inspector of the Armed Forces

retired from the army and put into high profile civilian jobs. For example, General Roman Gorecki became Director of Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego, General Jakub Krzemienski became Chairman of the Supreme Chamber of Control, Kordian Zamorski became Chief of Police and General Stefan Paslawski became the Voivode (Governor) of Bialystok. These ex-servicemen naturally transplanted some military procedures into the administrative bodies they entered and, probably unconsciously, attempted to turn the civil servants into soldiers.[96] And although standing to attention and reporting in formal tones did not become normal practice, other 'military' practices were adopted.[97] Decisions were taken more readily with less consultation, bureaucracy was cut down and, in general, less paper was generated. Some departments would also incorporate elements of the military working style. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, for example, had a de facto 'general staff' – a small group of officials who controlled information and drafted political strategy – which operated out of the Minister's secretariat.

Unsurprisingly, many of the Legionaries already installed in state administration drafted in further former comrades in arms. Indeed, although despised and discouraged by Pilsudski, favouritism was not wiped out by the coup but enhanced. Contemporary documents suggest that prominent legionaries had to deal with dozens of applications from erstwhile colleagues or subordinates asking for help with jobs,

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should be insulated from political life and that the only person who could 'do politics in uniform is himself'. Waclaw Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia* [*Memoirs*], (Wroclaw, 1993), 270.

96 Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 27, Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America - New York (thereafter abbreviated to JPIoA – NY), *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

97 Piotr Lossowski, *Dyplomacja Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*Diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 1992), 221.

transfers, tenancies and even hospitality licenses.[98] Sometimes no appeals were necessary as just a mention of one's Legionary past could open doors or change the attitude of uncooperative bureaucrats. In fact, at one point the number of claimed Polish Legion veterans far exceeded the formation's actual head count.[99]

This elevated status of Pilsudski's Legion affected the public's overall attitude towards the armed forces. With the 1920 triumph over the Red Army still fresh in many minds, the Polish people held the military in great esteem. What is more, they believed that their army was among the best in the world, well trained, well equipped and more than able to defend the country's borders.[100] This attitude did not alter after Marshal Pilsudski's death. Indeed, as we will see in later chapters, the regime's skillful propaganda reinforced it to the point that writing in 1938 the British Ambassador to Warsaw, Howard Kennard remarked that:

> Is impossible for any observer to live long in Poland without being struck by the essentially military outlook of the people. They take a very great, and in many ways justifiable, pride in their army in which the training is undoubtedly among the hardest in the world. Military service, as the Minister for War remarked in his speech, has social and educational value in this country as well as a military one. The present regime depends essentially upon the political support of the ex-service men with their strong military tradition, and the Government and the

[98] Kordian Zamorski's diary offers multiple examples of this phenomenon.
[99] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 276.
[100] Reminiscing on the 1930s, Polish post-war oppositionist-come-politician Wladyslaw Bartoszewski spoke about the public's unwavering belief in their Army's might which transcended class and political divisions. Michal Komar and Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, *Wywiad rzeka* [*Extended Interview*], (Warszawa, 2006), 29-30

> Camp of National Unity are both headed by retired army officers. The position of the armed forces in Poland is one of supremacy (….)[101]

Interwar Poland spent a third of her national budget on the armed forces. The military benefited from generous public contributions to the National Defence Fund and state investment in shared military and civilian infrastructure.[102] Its General Inspector for the Armed Forces (Commander in Chief) enjoyed the status of the 'Second Person in the State' behind the President, its Prime Minister was a general and the Minister of Foreign Affairs a retired colonel. And yet none of its leaders predicted or prepared for the German attack of September 1939 as efficiently as they might have done. This thesis argues that some of the blame for the fiasco of the September 1939 campaign should be laid on Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly and Foreign Minister Jozef Beck, whose personal and ideological conflict impaired interdepartmental communication, intelligence flow, strategic planning and effective foreign policy formation. However, before we move on to charting out their strife, the next chapter will introduce to readers the two protagonists, their respective entourages, and other key personalities of late 1930s Poland.

[101] Howard Kennard to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary, 7 Feb. 1938, The National Archives (hereafter abbreviated to TNA), C 98958555, Foreign Office (hereafter abbreviated to FO) 417/38.

[102] These were 'public developments' such as roads. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 7 Feb. 1938, TNA, C 98958555, FO 417/38.

Chapter Two: *A Biographical Studies of the Foreign and Defence Policy Decision-Making elite in 1930s Poland*

Some readers may notice similarities between the dramatic events described and analysed in this thesis and the plots of Shakespeare's plays: as in *Hamlet* or *King Lear* where a ruler's death often prompts a bitter struggle for power that inadvertently facilitates a foreign conquest, so it was in interwar Poland. And while the author of this PhD thesis is not a dramatist but a historian, I argue that to understand the processes and appreciate the findings presented in further chapters, readers need to grasp the complex internal situation in inter-war Poland and the *dramatis personae* who shaped it.[103]

Biographical sketches of the two figures central to our argument - Foreign Minister Jozef Beck and General Inspector of the Armed Forces Edward Rydz-Smigly – will be followed by the information about their respective entourages and other prominent public figures.

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As we saw in the previous chapter, in the years following the 1926 coup the legend of Pilsudski's Legion and, in particular, of his First Company became

[103] The increased scholarly focus on psychological factors in decision making dates back to the mid-20th century when psychologists, political scientists and, to a lesser extent, historians began to assess the role of individuals and personalities in policy and decision-making. See for example, Donald Cameron Watt, *Personalities and Policies: Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century*, (Notre Dame, 1965); Daniel Levinson, 'Authoritarian Personality and Foreign Policy', *Conflict Resolution*, 1 (1), (1957), 37-47. This author agrees with the view that historical events cannot be fully evaluate d without considering the role of individuals and the purpose of this chapter is to identify the commonalities and differences among the prominent members of the Polish elite which would allow us to examine how these influenced their decision making between 1936 and 1939.

inextricably linked to the rebirth of the Polish state in 1918. The Zwiazek Legionistow Polskich (Legionaries Association formed in 1918), the organisation of veteran Legionaries, operated in all sixteen voivodeships (high-level regional administrative units) as well as Warsaw and, as we will see in further chapters, its General Congresses occasionally provided an arena for conflicts between political factions or even a springboard for new political ambitions.[104]

Naturally, a spell in Pilsudski's legions did no harm to man's military or political career hopes. Indeed, in a scathing critique of his staffing choices, the British ambassador to Warsaw, Howard Kennard described the Marshal as a 'mediocre judge of character, […] inclined to surround himself by men whose only qualification might be their struggle in the Legions or participation in some other way in the struggle for Polish independence.'[105] Indeed, looking through WWI photographs one is startled to see how many of Poland's future leaders and highest-ranking officers can be spotted. These snapped mementos of respite show future Prime Ministers: Walery Slawek and Janusz Jedrzejewicz, generals: Kazimierz Sosnkowski, Tadeusz Kasprzycki and Leon Berbecki, ambassadors: Michal Sokolnicki and Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski and finally a young bearded Edward Rydz (Pilsudski's successor at the helm of the army) and a fresh-faced Jozef Beck (the Foreign Minister). Indeed, in a testimony to how small and close-knit the

[104] For example, in a speech for the delegates to the XIII General Congress (1935) Edward Rydz-Smigly asserted his leadership and military credentials. Moreover, the idea of a new political movement, the Camp of National Unity was first introduced during the 1936 Delegates' Congress and the internal conflicts within the Sanacja regime were exposed when a group of prominent Pilsudskites boycotted the XIV General Congress (1937). Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal in London, 11 Aug. 1937, TNA, C58872455, FO 371/20759.

[105] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1935, TNA, C 52257555, FO 417/35.

Sanacja elite was, they even show Jozef Beck's second wife's first husband, Stanislaw Burkchardt-Bukacki.

(ii) *Jozef Beck*

(Source: NAC[106])

The photograph above shows Jozef Beck, Poland's Foreign Minister at the outbreak of the Second World War and one of the two people whose actions are central to this thesis. A picture is supposed to be worth a thousand words, which is perhaps why some writers believe that a photograph alone can bring alive the ghosts of figures past. However, the only things this picture tells us about Colonel Beck are that he possessed a rather prominent nose and that half-profile was not the best angle for him. Over the next few pages, we will look at Beck's life and character in an attempt to help the reader understand his behaviour during the period under examination.

[106] Jozef Beck, portrait photograph, Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (thereafter NAC), zes. Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, 1-A-2449-3.

The future Foreign Minister was born on 4 October 1894 to Warsaw-based intelligentsia family of Flemish origin.[107] His father, Jozef Senior, a lawyer by training, was disbarred and imprisoned for two years for his involvement in the Polish national movement. Trying to escape Russian repression, the family moved often and young Jozef spent the first three years of his life in Riga.[108] The Becks later moved to Lvov and eventually settled in Limanowa (in Austria-Hungary), where Beck lived until his secondary school graduation. Initially set on becoming an engineer, he enrolled in Lvov Technical University but soon moved to Vienna to study international trade. He clearly enjoyed the time spent in the imperial capital and, much to his subordinates chagrin, often reminisced on his antics there.[109] Indeed, when an opportunity presented itself during a brief 1937 stay in the city, Beck attempted to relive his memories. He happily sneaked out half way through the production of the *Rosenkavalier* and took his assistants on a jolly tour through Viennese drinking hovels and inns, delighted about 'not being a minister,' if only for these few hours.[110] The following morning the Minister's Private Secretary's diplomatic skill was put to a test when he had to fend off Mrs Beck's telephone enquiries after her husband, who was sleeping like a log. He later overheard his boss fabricating the details of the performance to his wife.[111] Had Mrs Beck realised she was being lied to, she would likely have very angry with him as his drinking habits reportedly nearly cost him his career.

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[107] Olgierd Terlecki, *Pulkownik Beck* [*Colonel Beck*], (Krakow, 1985), 13.
[108] Different spelling of the family name (Bek) used by Beck's father is often attributed to an attempt to confuse the Tsarist police forces.
[109] Marian Romeyko, *Wspomnienia o Wieniawie i rzymskich czasach* [*Remembering Wieniawa and Roman times*], (London, 1969), 67.
[110] Pawel Starzenski, *Trzy lata z Beckiem* [*Three years with Beck*], (Warszawa, 1991), 55.
[111] Starzenski, *Trzy lata,* 55.

After a promising start, when he was said to have been hand-picked by Pilsudski to negotiate the right of passage for Polish troops in 1919 with Romania and later appointed military consultant to the Polish-Lithuanian talks in 1921,[112] Beck was expelled from Paris in 1922, barely a year after he arrived there as the new Polish Military Attaché. One of the possible reasons for this banishment was Beck's insulting of the French Army (and its officers), insolent behaviour likely to have been caused by the influence of drink.[113] Even if one dismisses this allegation as malicious gossip and agrees with Richard Watt, who explained Beck's departure by a transfer of power from Pilsudski to Witos (and Dmowski),[114] there is no denying the fact that his debauched and dissolute life lost him Pilsudski's favour. Indeed in early 1926 the Marshal even dismissed him as an 'idiot'.[115] Pilsudski's attitude towards the man changed rapidly because only four years later, in 1930, he would blackmail his newly formed cabinet into agreeing to making Beck his Deputy.[116]

Beck's 'rehabilitation' can be attributed to his unequivocal support for Pilsudski during the May Upheaval - the 1926 Military Coup. He spent the next four years

[112] The 4th Polish Riffles Division commanded by General Lucjan Zeligowski was part of the French contingent fighting against the Red Army.

[113] Other versions of the story point to promiscuity – on either Beck's on his first wife's part - and, more damningly for the Minister, the stealing secret French documents as the reasons for his sudden departure. The latter allegation proved particularly tenacious. Perpetuated by anti-Sanacja figures (e.g.: Wladyslaw Sikorski, Wincenty Witos), it continues to periodically resurface (most recently in a 2009 volume of published Russian Archival Sources. Lev Sockov (ed.), *Siekriety polskoj politiki. Sbornik dokumientow (1935–1945)* [*The secrets of Polish policy: Collected documents (1935-1945)*], (Moscow, 2009)) and contributed to Beck's so-called 'Black Legend'. A negative and arguably skewed historical depiction of the Foreign Minister by certain Western, Russian and Polish Communist, and émigré historians.

[114] Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate 1918-1939* (New York, 1982), 311.

[115] Slawomir Koper, *Zycie prywatne elit II Rzeczpospolitej* [*The private life of the elites of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2005), 25.

[116] According to the future Premier, Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski, prior to accepting his Premiership, Marshal Pilsudski inquired whether his ministers would mind him bringing Colonel Beck in as Deputy Prime Minister and a Minister without portfolio. He warned that in the event of opposition to Beck's candidacy, he would chose him above any Minister. Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski, *Strzepy Meldunkow* [*Scraps of reports*], (Warszawa, 1988), 135.

being groomed for diplomacy as the Marshal's Chief of Staff in the Ministry for Military Affairs. An official from the War Ministry recalled a conversation with the Marshal: 'Do not count on Beck. You will never have him. M. Beck is not going to make his career in the army. M. Beck will go to Foreign Affairs, to be charged with responsibilities of high importance.'[117] Nevertheless, some observers, including the then French Ambassador to Warsaw, Jules Laroche, believed that Beck's success was really down to his second wife Jadwiga.[118] Even Pilsudski is said to have remarked on how helpful Mrs Beck could be during official visits. When *the couple* met they were both married to other people.[119] And if the amiable split of Jadwiga's marriage went largely unnoticed,[120] Beck's divorce from beautiful, long-legged Maria, raised eyebrows.[121] Indeed, persons as sympathetic to him as his Chef de Cabinet – Michal Lubienski, were puzzled at how this faithful and honourable 'medieval knight' could leave his wife just weeks before the birth of his son.[122] Adopting the widely spread practice of his time, Beck then converted to Calvinism.[123] He and Jadwiga Burkhardt-Bukacka wed sometime in 1927.

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[117] Henry L. Roberts, 'The Diplomacy of colonel Beck', *The Diplomats 1919*-1939, Gordon A Craig and Felix Gilbert (eds), (Princeton, 1953), 580.

[118] Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 24.

[119] Jozef Beck was married to Maria Slonimska and Jadwiga Salkowska to General Stanislaw Burhard-Bukacki. Waclaw Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach przedwojennych* [*Stories of people and times of the Antebellum*], (Warszawa, 2000), 253.

[120] Terlecki, *Pulkownik Beck*, 63.

[121] In a stark contrast to Jadwiga, Maria Beck's first wife seems to have lived entirely in the shadow of her husband and was hardly afforded a mention by her contemporaries. The diary of journalist Waclaw Zbyszewski being one notable exception. Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 253.

[122] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 41. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes, 103/28.

[123] In the early years of the Second Polish Republic, divorce was not possible under Polish law. In order to remarry, one needed to either obtain an annulment from the Church or convert. Given the relative ease of converting, the practice was widespread among the Polish elites. Indeed, Pilsudski himself led the way, his marriage to his first wife Maria was celebrated in a Lutheran church whereas his second one, to Aleksandra – a Catholic one.

The new Mrs Beck came from a wealthy bourgeois background. She was well travelled, intelligent, cultured and multilingual. A perfect wife for a diplomat and doubtless an asset to a man bent on a political career. As soon as the wedding bells sounded, Jadwiga Beck took to work on her groom's public image. In particular, she curbed his fondness for drink. Ambassador Joules Laroche recalled a particular party at the Romanian legation, when as soon as Beck started showing signs of enjoying himself a little too much, his hawk-eyed wife glided over and took away his champagne glass with a reproachful 'You've had enough of that already.'[124]

Despite being a doting and indulgent husband, Jozef Beck never fully gave up his drink.[125] Indeed, his Chef the Cabinet, Michal Lubienski goes as far as calling him an alcoholic in his memoir.[126] However, in testimony to *Dziuba's* effectiveness, his overindulgences became rarer and were confined to occasions when he escaped his wife's watchful eye. His visits to Geneva are a notable example of just such transgressions. A whisky enthusiast, Beck would 'dine' with the Polish representative to the League of Nations, Tytus Komarnicki.[127] And then, much to Komarnicki's and his wife's annoyance, spend hours 'having a dram' and 'monologuing about his visions for changing European policy.'[128]

Always a divisive figure, Jozef Beck's sympathetic contemporaries his friends, family and subordinates admired his wit, patriotism and honour. Painting a picture of

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[124] Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 24.

[125] In a biting commentary on Beck's ascension to Pilsudski's cabinet in 1930, General Kordian Zamorski, claimed that Beck's first decision was to reinstate his drinking companion, Wladyslaw Jaroszewicz as the Governmental Commissar for Warsaw. Kordian Jozef Zamorski, *Dzienniki (1930-1938)* [*Diaries (1930-1938)*], (Warszawa, 2011), 4.

[126] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 41. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

[127] Tytus Komarnicki served as the Polish Representative to the League of Nations between 1934 and 1939.

[128] Koper, *Zycie* prywatne, 25-26.

a devoted father and husband, a well-meaning if misguided statesman and above all a passionate follower of Pilsudski who cherished the Marshal's friendship and mourned his death.[129] The Minister's critics, like fellow Minister, father Bronislaw Zongollowicz, saw him as an aloof and cocksure opportunist. A 'Yes-Man' whose silver-tongue won him Pilsudski's favour which he then abused for position and material benefit.[130] This author agrees with both sides' belief that Pilsudski is the 'key to Beck'. Indeed, as we will see in later chapters, not only were the late Marshal's ideas central to Beck's foreign policy, they were also one of the causes of the Minister's rocky relationship with Edward Rydz-Smigly – Jozef Pilsudski's successor at the helm of the Polish Army.

According to his latest biography, Beck first met Pilsudski in Zakopane in 1913, while visiting the resort with his uncle, who was involved in the independence movement.[131] One may presume that young Jozef was very impressed by his namesake as soon after this meeting he joined the Polish Military Organisation (POW) and became a member of Pilsudski's Polish Legion. Beck advanced quickly through the ranks and by spring 1916 he had already became an officer – a second lieutenant. Following Poland's independence, Beck enlisted in the newly forming Polish Army and commanded a platoon during the 1918 Polish-Ukrainian War. As

[129] Michal Lubienski went as far as to say that Pilsudski was Beck's 'religion, philosophy and morality'. Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 43. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.
[130] Bronislaw Zongollowicz, *Dzienniki 1930-1936* (Warszawa, 2004), 346.
[131] Pawel Wronski, 'Jozef Beck i jego polityka zagraniczna. Namascil go Marszalek' ['Jozef Brck and his foreign policy. Annointed by the Marshal'], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21 September 2009, Archiwum Cyfrowe http://wyborcza.pl/1,97737,7056499,Jozef_Beck_i_jego_polityka_zagraniczna__Namascil_go.html (last accessed on 6 September 2013).

we already know, Beck's rise halted somewhat in latter half of the 1920s only to resume in 1930.

Interestingly, despite Pilsudski's long term plans to entrust Polish diplomacy to Beck, the man who was to become the longest-serving foreign minister of the Second Republic never formally became a diplomat. Indeed, as Jan Meysztowicz pointed out, 'Beck did not see himself as a politician who once wore a uniform, but as a senior level soldier who, after being ordered so by the Marshal, took over the management of Polish foreign policy.'[132] Yet 1930 brought a definitive farewell to arms for Beck who was put on gardening leave from his post at the Ministry of Military Affairs. Initially due to last 6 months, this break was later extended by a further year. It was around this time that, according to contemporaries, the Warsaw political and diplomatic community began to suspect Beck's impending move to the world of foreign affairs as he started appearing at functions not in uniform but in white tie.[133] Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Beck missed his former life and might have held mufti in slight disdain. When given a choice of outfits during his visit to George VI's coronation, not once did he forgo his dress uniform in favour of tails.[134] The Germans in particular were quick to notice Beck's yearning for his army days. On one occasion, after inspecting the troops during an official visit to Berlin, the Minister was delighted to hear that the officers recognised in him a fellow soldier and complimented his posture and walk. This 'soldierly' attitude was also apparent in

[132] Piotr Lossowski, *Dyplomacja Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*Diplomacy of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 1992), 255.
[133] Koper, *Zycie prywatne* 24.
[134] Starzenski, *Trzy lata,* 17 -18.

Beck's attitude towards Pilsudski, to whom he continued to refer to the 'Commandant' and whose instructions were 'orders'.[135]

After a brief stint as Pilsudski's Deputy Prime Minister in Autumn 1930, the Marshal made Beck 'his man' in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs which was at the time run by August Zaleski. Naturally, not all Ministry employees approved of Beck's arrival. One of them, Knoll, even compared it to 'a bandit's descent on an idiots' shelter.'[136] Formally only a deputy, Beck, surrounded by a troupe of other officers 'seconded' to the Foreign Ministry, quickly established his authority within the institution. His nickname, 'the Boss', does not leave any doubt as to who the civil servants thought in charge of the establishment. Zaleski, by contrast, was referred to as a much more benevolent sounding 'Patron'.[137] Indeed, 1930 marks the beginning of the development of what became known as 'Beck's Foreign policy', initially defined in opposition to Zaleski, who had by then fallen out of Pilsudski's favour. Zaleski remained in office until November 1932 but his departure was so foretold that when Beck rang Pilsudski's office on 2 November, and asked the Marshal's adjutant to inform Pilsudski that he (Beck) could now be reached under the new number; Lepecki instantly congratulated him on his elevation.[138] 'There is nothing to congratulate' replied Beck, ever the soldier, as he began his seven-year tenure at the Foreign Ministry. The first two and a half years of his service saw him negotiate and sign, in accordance with Pilsudski's instructions, the German-Polish Non-Aggression

[135] Repeated mentions of Beck referring to 'Commandant' and his 'orders' can be found throughout Jadwiga Beck, *Kiedy bylam Ekscelencja* (Warszawa, 1990); Starzenski, *Trzy lata*; Michal Lubienski's manuscript. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.
[136] Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 253.
[137] Konrad Wrzos, *Pulkownik Jozef Beck* [*Colonel Jozef Beck*], (Warszawa, 1939), 7.
[138] Lepecki, *Pamietnik*, 139.

Treaty of 1934. He would regard this as one of his greatest achievements, no doubt contributing to his perception of this treaty as a 'constant' element in the Polish foreign policy framework.

But what about the man behind the picture? Ever the cautious intelligence operative and blessed with a prodigious memory, Beck reportedly disliked the written word. He kept note and instruction writing to the bare minimum and even though he left behind his unfinished monograph 'The Last Report' this document does not shed very much light on the Minister's character and decision making process.[139] Indeed, to pass judgement on Beck 'the man', scholars have to rely on second – and third – hand accounts. These suggest a man who was 'reserved and quiet' in social situations and who 'never talked politics.'[140] He also seems to have enjoyed his morning lie-ins and spend relatively little time in his ministerial office, a practice that once led to a diplomatic spat.[141]

The Minister's nearest and dearest praised his easy charm and the ability to make others feel at ease.[142] Most friends and foes alike praised his intellect[143] and the fact

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[139] In a 2009 interview, Leopold Unger who was sheltered by Beck in the Bulgarian villa the minister spend most of his internment, mentioned that he believed that Beck was writing another monograph but in the end no manuscript was found. Leopold Unger. 'Ostatnia wilia ministra Becka' ['*Minister Beck's last Christmas Eve*'], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21 September 2009, Archiwum Cyfrowe http://wyborcza.pl/1,97737,7056498,Ostatnia_wilia_ministra_Becka.html (last accessed on 6 September 2013).

[140] After Halina Regulska, *Dziennik z oblezonej Warszawy* [*Diary from a besieged Warsaw*], (Warszawa, 1978), 27.

[141] When British Ambassador Howard Kennard called on Beck in the morning of 1 October 1938, he was asked to return later as the Minister was still abed. News of this leaked to the Polish press, which full of nationalist zeal after the incorporation of Zaolzie, reported that the Minister refused to see the British official. This was picked up by the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, and commented on by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons. In the end the Foreign Office forced London's Polish Embassy and the Foreign Ministry to issue denials in British and local press. William Strang, Head of the Central Department at the Foreign Office in London, to British Embassy in Warsaw, 10 Oct. 1938, TNA, C 1193755, FO 371/21810.

[142] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 34; Unger. 'Ostatnia wilia',

that he did not bear grudges. Indeed, even one of the Minster's harshest critics – Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz refutes the claim that it was Beck's anger at a hostile *Slowo*[144] article caused his (Mackiewicz's) incarceration in the Bereza Kartuska detention camp.[145]

In October 1932, around the time of Beck's taking office in the Bruehl Palace,[146] Warsaw's gossips whispered that as Minister Zaleski's deputy, Beck took advantage of his superior's absences to slowly take control over the resort. Indeed, Zaleski's resignation was reportedly prompted by his discovery, upon his return from a League of Nation's summit in Geneva, that someone (presumably Beck or one of 'Beck's people') had rifled through his desk.[147] Yet, to people familiar with the internal politics of the Sanacja regime, the switch was nothing more than the culmination of an ongoing shift in the direction of Polish foreign policy, and that Beck's 1930 appearance in the Ministry marked him as the 'heir apparent' to Zaleski, who was quickly loosing Pilsudski's favour.

Sensation-hungry scandalmongers fabricated that particular little coup but, as we will see in later chapters, Beck's own lengthy absences created real opportunities to undermine him in turn. They were only partly due to his ministerial duties. Having gone through a bout of tuberculosis in his youth, Beck periodically suffered from

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http://wyborcza.pl/1,97737,7056498,Ostatnia_wilia_ministra_Becka.html (last accessed on 6 September 2013).

143 Although Beck himself, is said, to affect an 'anti-intellectual' pose. Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 39. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

144 *Slowo* was a conservative daily newspaper published in Vilna.

145 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an official communiqué to distance itself from the arrest. Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz, *Polityka Becka* [*Beck's policy*], (Krakow, 2009), 187.

146 Colloquial name for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

147 Jan Gawronski, *Moja misja w Wiedniu 1932-1938* [*My posting to Vienna 1932-1938*], (Warszawa, 1965), 17.

relapses of the disease.[148] According to Lubienski, the Minister's health deteriorated dramatically in 1936 when the TB spread to his stomach.[149] No longer 'His old brilliant self,'[150] but determined to carry on despite his illness, Beck apparently entrusted his health to the famous Polish healer Oskar Wojnowski.[151] Wojnowski, given a few days notice, was able to patch him up in time for a foreign visit or other, similarly important, occasion.[152] Once in a while, though, Beck's health caught up with him and he would travel south for some respite. That was when the Minister's adversaries made inroads into his domain.[153]

As long as Marshal Pilsudski was alive he decided on the principles of Polish foreign policy. Thus, it is not surprising that after the Marshal's death, Beck's main competitor for control over Poland's diplomacy was Pilsudski's successor at the helm of the armed forces, General, later Marshal, Edward Rydz-Smigly.

[148] He would eventually die of it 1941, during his internment in Romania.
[149] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 41. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.
[150] Lubienski quoted in Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 258.
[151] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 41. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Refer to Chapter Three, 111 – 112 for more detail.

(II) *Edward Rydz-Smigly*

(Source: NAC[154])

In his description of Beck, Lubienski wrote that the Minister looked 'more like an artist than a soldier.'[155] Amusingly, a similar description could not have been afforded to Marshal Rydz-Smigly (pictured above), who – bold and clean-shaven – had been an artist but looked rather more soldierly.

In contrast to Beck's, and indeed most of the Pilsudskite establishment's, upper or middle class backgrounds, Edward Rydz-Smigly came from very humble and somewhat murky beginnings. As he rose to prominence, the 'yellow press'[156] increasingly speculated about his and his family's origins. Rydz-Smigly consistently declined to comment, and while he continued to visit his hometown of Brzezany and even funded three scholarships for poor students attending his former secondary school, he was careful to keep his past under wraps. Indeed, immediately after

[154] Edward Rydz-Smigly, portrait photograph, NAC, zes, Koncern Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny – Archiwum Ilustracji, 1-A-2449-3.
[155] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 39. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.
[156] Polish for 'Red Tops'.

becoming the Second Person in the State, he ordered the marriage certificate of his parents and his mother's death certificate to be marked as secret.[157] This, as well as his expressed belief that people ought to be judged by their deeds not their birth suggest that Rydz-Smigly might have been a little sensitive about his background. If so, it could explain why, at the height of his career, he became quite susceptible to flattery.

Two years Beck's junior, Rydz was reportedly born out of wedlock on 11 March 1886 in Brzezany, a small town in the 'Polish' Ukraine. His parents, Maria Babiak and Tomasz Rydz, a warrant officer, married in 1888, shortly before his father's death from tuberculosis. Maria followed her husband just eight years later, leaving Edward an orphan at the age of ten. The Rydz family lived in a different part of the country and did not acknowledge the boy so he was entrusted into his maternal grandparents' care. This worked well until his grandfather Jan's death that came soon after Edward's enrolment at the local secondary school. His grandmother, who was reportedly never too pleased about the charge foisted on her, began to openly resent Rydz-Smigly as she struggled to support both of them.[158] Their house fell into terrible disrepair and Rydz-Smigly was eventually rescued from its draughts and leaky roof by the well-off parents of one of his school friends, Edmund Urbanowicz.[159]

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[157] This was to cover up his mother's Orthodox faith which could have proved embarrassing considering the ongoing ethnic Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Galicja. Andrzej Suchcitz, 'Dziecinstwo Edwarda Smiglego-Rydza' [*'Edward Smigly-Rydz's childhood'*], *Zeszyty Historycze,* 81(434), (Paris, 1987), 196-197.

[158] Edward Urbanowicz quoted in Cezary Lezanski, *Kwatera 139. Opowiesc o marszalku Rydzu-Smiglym* [*Grave 139. The tale of Marshal Rydz-Smigly*], (Lublin, 1989), 21.

[159] Lezenski, *Kwatera 139*, 21.

Not long after, young Edward discovered that he had some artistic talent and spent hours sketching or painting (mostly landscapes or imaginary scenes from the most recent of failed Polish independence spurts, the January Uprising). Encouraged by his new guardians, the Urbanowiczes, and their friend Michalina Widmanowa who offered to fund him, in 1905 Edward Rydz-Smigly enrolled into the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow.[160] There, he was taught by some of the finest Polish painters but Rydz-Smigly's own paintings were apparently mediocre.[161]

Amusingly, Edward's benefactress, Widmanowa, a fortune-teller of some local renown, is said to have on occasion predicted the First World War, Polish independence and Rydz-Smigly's eventual ascent to the helm of the Polish Army. Naturally, at the time everyone treated these revelations with a raised eyebrow and they must have been a cause of some confusion and embarrassment for Edward. In spite of being involved in the Polish Independence Movement (Zwiazek Walki Czynnej) since his arrival in Krakow, he was set on becoming an artist. However, the Austro-Hungarian universal conscription interrupted Rydz-Smigly's academic progress in 1910. Despite an offer from a friendly doctor to help him dodge the draft, Edward – who had by then adopted his nom de guerre 'Smigly' - took a year out to

[160] According to other sources, a few prominent Bzezany families (the Urbanowiczes, the Widmans, the Barzykowskis and the Schaetzels) funded or secured a scholarship for Edward. Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 219

[161] According to his college friend, Franciszek Studzinski, Rydz-Smigly exhibited his paintings Studnicki's father's gallery but none of them ever sold and, after years of storage, the pieces eventually perished in war-time Warsaw. Incidentally, Studzinski claims that eight other, equally 'chocolate-boxy' landscapes, signed 'A.Hitler' were destroyed alongside Rydz-Smigly's work. Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 61-62.

complete his national service.[162] He explained that the experience could become useful in the Polish independence struggle.

Once in uniform, the mustachioed painter so impressed his superiors that he was offered a commission. Rydz-Smigly declined it and went back to university, but must have enjoyed soldiering because soon after his return to Krakow he joined the Riflemen's Association with which he completed his officer's training.[163] Through this paramilitary work, Rydz-Smigly met some of Pilsudski's closest associates, including future Prime Ministers Walery Slawek and Aleksander Prystor. According to his official pre-Second World War biographies, Edward had also met and 'became a friend' of Jozef Pilsudski.[164] It is not clear whether this is true. The late 1930's biographies of Rydz-Smigly were propaganda intended to develop his personality cult. So although the two could have met before the First World War, it is unlikely that this 'played a decisive role in [Rydz-Smigly's] later life.' In any event, Rydz-Smigly, charming, good-looking and extraordinarily well organised, was quickly entrusted with command of the Association's Brzezany chapter, of which he was himself a member.[165] This proved a prelude to an extraordinarily brilliant

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[162] *Przebieg sluzby Wojskowej Marszalka Smiglego-Rydza w Armii Austriackiej* [*Record of Marshal Smigly-Rydz's service in the Austrian Army*], undated, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Edwarda Rydza-Smiglego*, Zestaw 98/1.

[163] Zwiazek Strzelecki was a Polish paramilitary organisation.

[164] *Oficjalny Szkic Biograficzny Marszalka Edwarda Rydza-Smiglego* [*The Official Biographical Sketch of Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly*], (undated). JPIoA *Kolekcja Edwarda Rydza-Smiglego* Zes. 98/1.

[165] Rajmnund Scholtz, *Fragmenty pamietnika o przejsciu granicy wegierskiej przez gen (eneral) K(azimierz) Sosnkowskiego* [*Memoir excerpts on how General K(azimierz) Sosnkowski crossed the Hungarian border*] (undated). Jozef Pilsudski Institute – London (thereafter referred to as JPI-L). *Kolekcja Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego* 19/5/3/4.

military career that saw him gain Pilsudski's approval and attain a colonelcy by the age of 31.[166]

Although one of the original legionaries, Rydz-Smigly was not a member of Pilsudski's legendary First Cadre Company. Initially drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army, he joined the Commandant's troop in August 1914. He stood by Pilsudski during the so-called 'oath crisis'[167] in 1917 but, unlike most senior Pilsudskites, managed to escape prison on the grounds of poor health. As a senior officer still at large, Rydz-Smigly was named by Pilsudski as his successor as the Commander of the Polish Military Organisation. He managed very well until the very end of the war, when, in a misguided bid to secure Pilsusdkite influence against Dmowski's National Democrats, he mobilised his troops in November 1918 and initiated the formation of the Socialist government of Ignacy Daszynski. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to Rydz-Smigly, Pilsudski had by then decided to sever his ties with the Socialist movement and so was very displeased with Rydz-Smigly who, in his absence, became the Minister of War in the Daszynski cabinet formed in Lublin.

Out of his internment in Magdeburg, Pilsudski dismissed the Lublin government in his typically vulgar fashion and took Rydz-Smigly into his disfavour. In retaliation for what he perceived as disloyalty, the Marshal refused to acknowledge Rydz-Smigly's general's rank and initially kept him away from Warsaw. However, as

[166] Pilsudski praised Rydz-Smigly's leadership, heroism and calm in combat situations. Jozef Pilsudski, *Pisma zbiorowe* [*Collected writings*], Vol. 4, (Warszawa, 1989), 27-28.

[167] Trying to distance himself from the Central Powers following to capitulation of Russia, Pilsudski and his 1st and 3rd Brigades of the Legions declined to swear an oath of allegiance to Emperor Wilhelm II. As a result the Legions were forcibly dismantled. Their members either drafted to the Austro-Hungarian or Prussian armies or jailed. Pilsudski himself was detained in the Magdeburg fortress. Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 49-50.

we saw in Beck's case, the Marshal was able to change his mind and it was possible to reclaim his favour. As military activity continued, Rydz-Smigly quickly gained an opportunity to return to his good books. Initially sent out to Volhyn, he commanded a battle group during most of the Polish-Ukrainian and the early phase of the Polish-Bolshevik war. Later transferred to Lithuania, Rydz-Smigly continued to impress Pilsudski who would later describe him as having the 'strongest character and will of all the other Polish generals.'[168] Rydz-Smigly 's troops captured Vilna and a number of smaller towns occupied by the Red Army earning the general a public accolade from the Marshal.[169] Nevertheless, Pilsudski's assessment of Rydz-Smigly was not entirely composed of glowing positives. Although he described him as fair to his troops, the Marshal chastised Rydz-Smigly's 'capriciousness' and the tendency to surround himself with 'yes-men' who would not challenge him. He also doubted Rydz-Smigly 's ability to objectively evaluate a country's military strength.[170] As we will see in later chapters, both of these criticisms proved accurate.

Rydz-Smigly's later successes as the Commander of joint Polish-Latvian forces, which captured the Latvian city of Daugavpils in January 1920, from the Bolsheviks won him further praise and the Order of Virtuti Militari – Poland's highest military decoration. This good run continued with the capture of Kiev in May 1920. A comparatively easy victory, which nevertheless earned Rydz-Smigly the grand-sounding sobriquet 'The Conqueror of Kiev.'[171] Recognising his leadership and combat brilliance in the run up to what would prove the decisive battle of the war –

[168] Pilsudski's 1922 characteristics of Rydz-Smigly. Quoted in Ryszard Mirowicz, *Edward Rydz-Smigly: Dzialalnosc wojskowa i polityczna* [*Edward Rydz-Smigly: Military and political activity*], (Warszawa, 1988), 34.
[169] Pilsudski's appeal to the troops. First published in *Monitor Polski* on 30 April 1919, reprinted in Jozef Pilsudski, *Pisma Zbiorowe* [*Collected writing*s], Vol. 5, (Warszawa, 1937), 77.
[170] Pilsudski, *Pisma*, Vol. 5, 77.
[171] Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 229.

the Battle of the Vistula, Pilsudski then entrusted the 34 year old general the command of the Central Front which was to encircle the retreating Russian forces. As combat activities began to wind down in October 1920, Rydz-Smigly led his 3rd Army to assist General Lucjan Zeligowski in his 'mutiny', a sham insubordination that was orchestrated at Pilsudski's instigation and aimed at upholding Polish control over Vilna.

Rydz-Smigly's rehabilitation was complete. In peacetime, he was promoted to an Army Inspector and stationed in Vilna. Ostensibly content with his position, he appears to have learnt his lesson from the Lublin fiasco and either reined in or abandoned his political ambitions. Indeed, his friend Studnicki even commented on the general's dramatic change of behaviour following the end of the Polish-Bolshevik war. The formerly feisty Rydz-Smigly reportedly became passive and apathetic, 'all he was interested in was game of bridge and conversation with a few friends.'[172] This author believes Studnicki to be somewhat exaggerating in denying Rydz-Smigly any ambition. While it is true that others described him as 'quite shy', avoiding parties and having a 'retiring disposition,[173] Rydz-Smigly certainly continued to improve his theoretical military knowledge. He also never gave up on his other passion, painting, and would often go sketching when out on military exercises.

Studnicki suspected that Edward's marriage might have been the cause of his withdrawal. If true, it would make Marta Rydz the exact opposite to Jadwiga Beck,

[172] Quoted in Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 62.
[173] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1935, TNA, C 52257555, FO 417/35.

who, as we have mentioned earlier, was thought instrumental to her husband's success. Naturally, we cannot ascertain that this was indeed the case but it appears that the attractive Mrs Rydz held some influence over her husband.[174] This, combined with the most unattractive picture of her painted by contemporaries, earned her the moniker of Sanacja's *femme-fatale*.[175] She is said to have been greedy, hysterical, superstitious, snobbish and, above all, extremely fond of embarrassing her husband in public.[176] One of her favourite 'sports' in Vilna was to pick a young officer on the street, laden him with her shopping and flirt mercilessly all the way to home. There, the enthusiastic 'suitors' were inevitably met by general Rydz-Smigly who often had to revive the swooning or disarm the suicidal.[177] The popular commander must have felt uneasy about these antics but he either failed to intervene or his wife completely ignored him.

Rydz's support for Pilsudski's 1926 May Upheaval, resulted in his transfer from Vilna to Warsaw. Fortunately for him, by then Marta got bored of seducing dashing young officers. Instead, on the rare occasions that the couple participated in social events together, she wore gloves and blamed it on being allergic to her husband.[178] In

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[174] Letter by Madame Irena Sokolnicka, widow of Ambassador Michal Sokolnicki in Istambul, to the Jozef Pilsudski Institute, 11 Jul. 1964. Jozef Pilsudski Institute – London (thereafter abbreviated to JPI – L), *Kolekcja Ambasadora Michala Sokolnickiego*. Zes. 52/1.

[175] Dariusz Baliszewski, 'Polska femme-fatale' ['Polish femme-fatale'], *Wprost*, no. 51/52, (2006), Archiwum Cyfrowe, http://www.wprost.pl/ar/99991/Polska-femme-fatale/?pg=0 (last accessed on 6 September 2013).

[176] According to Luciana Frassati-Gawronska, Marta Rydz spent all her free time consulting fortunetellers. Luciana Frassati-Gawronska, *Przeznaczenie nie omija Warszawy* [*Destiny doesn't pass Warsaw*], (Warszawa, 2003), 45; Kordian Zamorski also suggested that she was treated by a dubious haler named Jaworowicz. Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 360.

[177] Baliszewski, 'Polska femme-fatale', http://www.wprost.pl/ar/99991/Polska-femme-fatale/?pg=0 (last accessed on 6 September 2013).

[178] Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 229.

reality, she probably tried to hide her paretic hand and Rydz-Smigly's agreement for this public humiliation demonstrates his devotion to his wife.

Following the couple's arrival in Warsaw, Edward's position put him in the public eye and warranted more frequent mentions in diplomatic reports and society gossip. Initially, they repeat the earlier observations of 'earnest and direct,' charming and courteous.[179] We also learn that he was very fond of children[180] and erudite – especially when talking about art – and quite well-read.[181] The earliest account of Rydz-Smigly's increasing touchiness dates back to 1934, when the then Prime-Minister, Janusz Jedrzejewicz, received a letter in which the general complained that Jedrzejewicz's friend, the MP Maria Jaworska, had criticised Marta Rydz in a private conversation in Krakow some weeks previously.[182] However, it was not until some 3 years later that Rydz-Smigly's metamorphosis was widely noticed. Things took a turn for the worse after Marshal Pilsudski's death in 1935.

According to contemporary accounts, it was widely expected that General Rydz-Smigly would take over the command of the army. Indeed, Pilsudski apparently wished him to do so and met with Rydz-Smigly just weeks before his death to speak about the plans for the reorganisation of the Polish forces. However, what few, if anyone, anticipated was that Rydz-Smigly could, or indeed, might ever want to become a 'like-for-like' replacement for the deceased Marshal. Writing in his diary in the turbulent months after May 1935, the former Prime Minister Kazimierz Switalski

[179] Koper, *Zycie prywante,* 229.
[180] This is evident not only through contemporary accounts (e.g. his building's attendant's son) but also through the fact that once he was in a position to do so, Rydz-Smigly founded three scholarships for gifted pupils from Brzezany. Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 233.
[181] Janusz Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie idei – Fragmenty pamietnika i pism* [*In idea's service – Excerpts from diary and writings*], (London, 1972), 209.
[182] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie idei*, 209.

remarked that the political bets that see Rydz-Smigly eventually becoming Poland's next President 'must be taken without Rydz-Smigly's knowledge.'[183] And while he did not doubt that the public's 'attachment to military figures' would raise Rydz's standing, Switalski was wary of allowing to the new General Inspector of the Armed Forces to take too active a role in political life.[184]

As we will see in later chapters, this very process is the backdrop if not the cause of the significant events analysed in this thesis. Regardless of whether it was caused by an awakening of dormant ambition, the influence of his snobbish wife who fancied herself the 'Grande Dame' of the Polish society,[185] self-interested opportunists,[186] or those members of the Sanacja regime who believed that the system required a leader-figure in order to continue. The latter would to some extent explain the bizarre, if brief, emergence of Rydz's portrait above Pilsudski's deathbed where it replaced the customary icon of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn.

In reality, all of these factors likely played a role. In an attempt to fill the vacuum left by Pilsudski, General Edward Rydz-Smigly was ‘en-marshaled’ and promoted to the 'Second Person in the state' in 1936. This was followed by attempts to justify Rydz-Smigly's position, which eventually turned into a personality cult complete with anthologies of his speeches, biographies for children as well as adult readers, and hagiographical songs and poetry.

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[183] Note from 19 November 1935, Andrzej Garlicki and Ryszard Swietek (ed.), *Kazimierz Switalski. Diariusz 1919-1935* [*Kazimierz Switalski's Diary 1919-1935*], (Warszawa, 1992), 705.

[184] Garlicki and Swietek, *Kaziemierz Switalski*, 706.

[185] According to Jan Gawronski, Marta Rydz was prone to taking advantage of her husband's position. Gawronski, *Moja misja*, 352.

[186] In Rydz-Smigly’s own words 'People devoted to him, even toadying who patronised him or abandoned completely after the war broke out.' This author suggests August Zaleski, Konrad Niezbrzycki (add some more) as examples of such people. Quotation after Jadwiga Maxymowicz-Raczynska's memoir. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Edwarda* Smiglego-Rydza, 98/2.

In the background, Poland's strategic situation continued to worsen through the mid-1930s as Nazi Germany dismantled the post war European settlement. And in addition to the main question about whether the poor relationship between Minister Beck and Marshal Rydz-Smigly impaired their perception of the German threat one of the side themes explored in this thesis is, whether Rydz-Smigly was aware of the danger but became prisoner to his public image or whether he lost grounding in reality and began to believe in the illusion himself.[187] A difficult task under any circumstances, addressing the matter is rendered even more complex by the dearth of material available to researchers.[188]

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As we have seen from the brief character sketches above, Beck and Rydz-Smigly differed in almost every aspect. Although they both grew up mostly in Austria-Hungary, in Polish Galicia, their backgrounds could not be more different. Beck was a typical member of the intelligentsia whereas Rydz-Smigly was an orphaned proletarian who was fortunate to have found benefactors willing to put him through school and university. Considering that even fifteen years later, youngsters from peasant and working class families constituted only 15% of all students, it is likely

[187] According to Jadwiga Maxymowicz-Raczynska, who sheltered Rydz-Smigly after he secretly returned to Warsaw in 1940, the marshal realised that he lacked Pilsudski's authority with President Moscicki. Yet, he was convinced he had clout over the army and high standing with Poland's allies. Jadwiga Maxymowicz-Raczynska's memoir. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Edwarda Smiglego-Rydza*, 98/2.

[188] In the previous chapter, I mentioned the gruesome circumstances surrounding the 1957 death of Rydz-Smigly's widow and the subsequent disappearance of his diary and most papers. Prior to her death Marta Rydz donated some document relating to Rydz-Smigly's 1936 visit to France to the Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America. The Sikorski Institute in London holds some of Rydz-Smigly's notes and correspondence.

that Rydz-Smigly always felt like an outsider in his milieu. Indeed, this could explain his transformation after elevation to the heights of national power.

What's more, their temperaments were poles apart – which translated to diverging paths in their military careers. Rydz-Smigly's brilliance in the field and leadership skills made for an excellent commanding officer. Beck, despite his later romanticising of soldiering, was better behind a desk than on a horse. Charming and intelligent, he became a negotiator.

However, what the two did have in common was Pilsudski.

Always on the hunt for talent, Pilsudski insisted that, after WWI broke out, the Austrian Army authorities transfer young Edward Rydz-Smigly from the 55th infantry division to his Polish Legion. Once there, he was able to prove himself and – was quickly promoted – until the fiasco of his involvement in the Lublin government which caused the young general great anguish. This author believes, that, this incident was one of the causes of the conflict central to this thesis.[189]

In a post-war letter to Mrs Beck, Michal Lubienski stated that following the ousting of Walery Slawek from premiership, 'Beck and the governmental camp [Rydz-Smigly] had a different idea about what it meant to maintain Pilsudskite values in Poland's internal policy.'[190] This thesis asserts that the conflict extended well beyond internal politics and into foreign policy and that its roots did not lie

[189] As we will see in Chapter Three, some of Rydz-Smigly's more suspicious contemporaries – notable Pilsudskites - emphasised his hostile, or in any rate less venerate attitude to Pilsudski. It was commonly believed that it stemmed from the confrontation Pilsudski and Rydz-Smigly had over the former misguided involvement with the Lublin Socialist government. Letter by Madame Irena Sokolnicka, widow of Ambassador Michal Sokolnicki to the Jozef Pilsudski Institute, 11 Jul. 1964. JPI – L, *Kolekcja Ambasadora Michala Sokolnickiego*. Zes. 52/1.

[190] Michal Lubienski, Jozef Beck's Chef de Cabinet, in a letter to Jadwiga Beck, widow of Jozef Beck, 18 Aug. 1947. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/32.

simply in political infighting or even just ideological differences. Instead, personal reasons caused the dispute and sustained it.

For Beck, who, as we remember, was also at one point sidelined by the Marshal, a second chance translated into life-long devotion. Thus it is widely accepted that Pilsudski became the minister's 'religion, philosophy (…) a moral compass' and was central to his confidence and sense of self worth.[191] For Rydz-Smigly however, Pilsudski remained a senior officer. Discipline required that his orders – for example supplying troops during the 1926 Coup – were carried out, but his words never became the gospel they were to Beck.[192] Indeed, in Rydz-Smigly's view they were more like mumblings of a rambling lunatic, an opinion he apparently shared with his old friend and a fellow General Kordian Zamorski in July 1932.[193]

Later chapters will show that after Pilsudski's death, Beck's and Rydz-Smigly's differing attitude to the Marshal's legacy and political thought caused friction, breeding distrust and resentment between the two with disastrous effects on Poland's national security.

In the end, after the crushing defeat of September 1939 and not long after the events described in this thesis, both of the protagonists met with sad ends. Jozef Beck's tuberculosis returned with vengeance during his internment in Romania. He eventually succumbed to the illness after aerial bombings of Bucharest prompted the

[191] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, 43-44. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

[192] In a conversation with Zamorski on 1 October 1930, Rydz-Smigly bemoaned Pilsudski's lack of vision for the continuous development of the Armed Forces and his ignoring of German threat. This mismanagement apparently led him to consider leaving the Army. Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 51-52.

[193] Note from 11 July 1932: 'In [Rydz-Smigly's] view, [Pilsudski] is a madman [whose madness] will not be hidden from the public forever and once they find out they will think us [the Sanacja establishment] a herd of fools for not realising it.' Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 200. Incidentally, Zamorski was also, privately, very critical of the Marshal.

local authorities to move him, in early 1944, from a villa on the outskirts of the capital to a provincial village of Stanesti. Deprived of medical assistance and suffering from the poor conditions there, Beck died on 5 June 1944. As previously mentioned, Rydz-Smigly's early life was obscure; however, the circumstances surrounding his death are even murkier. Historians are at odds not only about the circumstances but even concerning the year of his death. The majority of scholars, this author included, support the view that Smigly died in occupied Warsaw of a heart attack on 2 December 1941. However, his host, Mrs Maxymowicz-Raczynska, suggested that Rydz-Smigly was murdered.[194] Another version, promoted by Dariusz Baliszewski, asserts that the marshal died of TB in Otwock in the summer of 1942.

(III) *The surrounding cast*

In the Prologue, I raised the spectre of the 'man who wasn't there', Poland's original Marshal: Jozef Pilsudski. Recall that shortly after the 1926 coup, he was offered – and refused – the office of the President of the Second Polish Republic. Instead, this ceremonial role went to **Ignacy Moscicki** who remained in office until October 1939. Born on 1 December 1867, a scion of an ancient, but somewhat impoverished, noble family, Moscicki followed a path typical of a man of his social background. After completing secondary education in Warsaw, he enrolled to read chemistry at the Riga Polytechnic Institute and become involved in the Polish independence cause. Eventually, in 1892, this nationalist zeal forced the newly wed

[194] Raczynska wrote to an acquaintance, general Waclaw Hryniewicz-Bakierowski, about her suspicion that Rydz-Smigly's adrenaline ampoules were tempered with. 'Zatrute Zycie Smiglego-Rydza' ['Rydz-Smigly's Poisoned Life'], *Focus*, 25 June 2012, Archiwum Cyfrowe, http://www.focus.pl/cywilizacja/zobacz/publikacje/zatrute-zycie-smiglego-rydza/nc/1/ (last accessed on 6 September 2013).

future President into exile.[195] Moscicki spent the next five years in London where he continued his education and took a variety of jobs ranging from carpentry to hairdressing (with a spell as a dairy merchant in between) to support his family. He also continued his involvement with the Polish cause. It was in London that Moscicki met and developed a friendship with Jozef Pilsudski and often had the future Marshal to stay at his house. The friendship and visits continued after the Moscickis moved to Switzerland where Ignacy was offered a research position at the University of Freiburg. Academic life agreed with him and he stayed in Switzerland for twelve years, where he developed a new method of nitric acid production and ran a factory which used the process.

Despite other, more profitable, offers, Moscicki decided to move his family back to 'Poland' and, in 1912, accepted a teaching position at the Lvov Polytechnic. After Polish independence, Moscicki, despite his early socialist sympathies (which he retained despite having run a factory), did not become involved in the politics of the new state. Instead, he became involved in the development of Polish chemical industry and continued his academic work first in Lvov and, since 1925 in Warsaw.

Nevertheless, through no involvement of his own, the May coup drew him to the corridors of power when the former Prime-Minister and fellow Lvov Polytechnic professor, Kaziemierz Bartel, suggested Moscicki as a presidential candidate to Pilsudski.[196] As the Presidency was a purely ceremonial function, so Moscicki's lack of political ambition and his familiarity with Pilsudski made him an ideal candidate

[195] Hoping to assassinate the Governor-General of Poland, Iosif Romeyko-Gurkho, Mosciki was preparing a suicide bombing of a Warsaw Orthodox church. Andrzej Garlicki, 'Prezydent Ignacy Moscicki' ['President Ignacy Mosckicki'], Proceedings of the *President Ignacy Moscicki w Spale* Conference in Spala, 30 September 2007, Wyzsza Szkola Turystyki i Rekreacji, (2007), 1.

[196] Andrzej Garlicki, 'Prezydent Ignacy Moscicki' ['President Ignacy Mosckicki'], Proceedings of the *President Ignacy Moscicki w Spale* Conference in Spala, 30 September 2007, Wyzsza Szkola Turystyki i Rekreacji, (2007), 4.

in the Marshal's eyes. After he was sworn in, the new President's only independent initiative was to encourage industrial (particularly chemical) development. However, because Pilsudski remained the de facto ruler he wanted to build up the prestige of the presidency. This manifested itself in showing particular deference to Moscicki as well as the decision to move the President's official residence from the Belvedere to Warsaw's Royal Castle. The 1926 'Godfather' initiative was also an attempt to popularise the office.[197]

Moscicki's first term ended in May 1933, after the election was brought forward by a month at Pilsduski's insistence. It appeared that the time for a 'yes-man' was over especially since this coincided with increased work on the new constitution granting more powers to the presidency. When in the end Pilsudski decided to endorse Moscicki's candidacy, the re-elected President seemed to take it to mean that he now had the Marshal's full confidence. Energised by this belief, or as the unkind would suggest, his new marriage, Moscicki became increasingly involved in political decision-making.[198] In fact, the real reason behind Moscicki's new independence was Pilsudski's ailing health. Having suffered two strokes, the Marshal was weak and no longer able to exercise full control and command over his disciples. This allowed

[197] Moscicki offered to become a 'godfather' to every seventh son born during his presidency to a law-abiding Polish family. The children included in the scheme benefited from free secondary and higher education and a savings account in their name. Moscicki's 'godchildren' were the subject of parliamentarian's Artur Gorski's question for the Polish Finance Minister. Parliamentary proceedings record, question number 3030 submitted during the Sejm's 32nd session, 7 Jan. 2013.

[198] Hinted at in British diplomatic cables. TNA, Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1938, TNA C 58422055, FO 417/38. Moscicki's first wife Michalina (his first cousin) died in August 1932 and his second marriage barely a year later, in October 1933, was shrouded in a cloud of scandal. The new First Lady, Maria was not only almost 30 years the President's junior, more controversially, she was his late wife's secretary and married to his adjutant.

Moscicki to have a say on ministerial and Prime-Ministerial nominations and resignations.[199]

The new constitution, that extended the President's powers became law in April 1935, less than a month before Pilsudski's death in May, after which the increasingly ambitious Moscicki was thrust to the centre of the vacuum in the Polish political scene. However, his days in office again looked to be numbered as Pilsudski had previously decided that Moscicki was to be forced out of office mid-term (in late 1935) and replaced by the Marshal's closest friend Walery Slawek. But, unexpectedly to almost everyone, the formerly pliable President did not resign his office. Rydz-Smigly became Moscicki's most important ally in the ensuing struggle, events that will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Despite his seemingly powerful office, this thesis treats Ignacy Moscicki as a secondary character who did not directly influence either Polish foreign policy or its defence strategy. Yet, especially after his truce with Rydz-Smigly came to an end in 1937, he provided a useful counterbalance for the quarrelling Rydz-Smigly and Beck.[200] Moreover, by keeping 'his man', the Deputy Prime Minister and Treasury Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski in power, Moscicki also maintained some control over the purse strings.

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[199] In May 1933 he supported the choice of Janusz Jedrzejewicz for Prime Minister. Two years later, in March 1935, he contributed to the resignation of Jedrzejewicz's successor, Leon Kozlowski. Andrzej Chojnowski, 'Ignacy Moscicki, Prezydent Rzeczpospolitej 1 VI 1926 – 31 IX 1936', *Prezydenci i Premierzy Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*Presidents and Prime Minister of the Second Polish Republic*], (Wroclaw, 1992), 225.

[200] Disagreements over Moscicki's drifting towards the left side of the Sanacja camp. TNA, Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1938, TNA, C 58422055, FO 417/38.

Kwiatkowski is most famous as the 'builder' or the initiator of the construction of Gdynia – a port to rival Danzig – on the narrow, 140 km long strip of the Baltic coast awarded to Poland in Versailles. A fellow chemist, who had worked with Moscicki in 1921 when the latter was put in charge of re-opening a nitrogen plant in Chorzow, he so impressed the future President that he recommended his candidacy for the Ministry of Industry and Trade. Unsurprisingly, when he was put in charge of assembling the new government in October 1935, Moscicki gave his protégée the Treasury brief and made him the Deputy Prime Minister.[201] Beck, who disliked him, had to put up with Kwiatkowski's 'economic experiments' until September 1939.[202]

For Prime Minister, Moscicki chose Marian Zyndram-Koscialkowski, a somewhat distant Pilsudskite who although 'a great friend of [Prystor, Switalski and the Jedrzejewicz brothers]' was not part of Sanacja's inner circle.[203] The Koscialkowski cabinet lasted only seven months and he was pushed out amid a power struggle between President Moscicki's 'Castle group' and Rydz-Smigly's clique. Koscialkowski's successor, general Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski was a soldier through-and-through, who had previously served as the second deputy to the Minister of Military Affairs and owed his speedy rise to being hand-picked for the post by Rydz-Smigly, whom he continued to view as his superior and 'regarded it as

[201] According to Kaziemierz Switalski, Kwiatkowski was the first member of the new cabinet to be picked, before even the PM, by Moscicki. Garlicki and Swietek, (ed.), *Kazimierz Switalski*, 669; British diplomatic reports also stress that Kwiatkowski enjoyed 'the particular confidence of the President.' TNA, Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1938, TNA, C 58422055, FO 417/38.

[202] In a note from 18 October 1935, Switalski recounted his meeting with Moscicki who quoted his conversation with Beck from five days before. Garlicki and Swietek, (ed.), *Kazimierz Switalski*, 681.

[203] Waclaw Jedrzejewicz , *Wspomnienia* [*Memories*], (Wroclaw, 1993), 256.

his primary duty to carry out [Rydz-Smigly's] orders.'[204] To further emphasise his allegiance, Skladkowski, who was also the Interior Minister, introduced weekly meetings with Rydz-Smigly, parallel to his audiences with the official head of state Moscicki.[205]

Skladkowski's former boss in the Ministry of Military Affairs, general Tadeusz Kasprzycki**,** was also associated with Rydz-Smigly. The British annual *Personalities in Poland* dispatches report general Kasprzycki's title as the Minister of War. This was a mistranslation which, as we will see, rather coincidentally hinted at the Minister's actual status within the Armed Forces.[206] Unlike in the Western European tradition, where a War Ministry was a purely administrative body whose chief responsibilities were matters of pay and procurement for the land army, the Polish Department was intended to be more akin to a present-day Defence Ministry. The Polish Minister of Military Affairs was not only responsible for the entirety of the Armed Forces (Army, Navy and the Air-Force), in peace time he also acted as Commander in Chief. He had the power to promote and demote officers and was constitutionally and parliamentary accountable for his decisions. In wartime, the command passed on to the deputy Minister of Military Affairs, the General Inspector

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[204] Upon entering he embarked on a new wave of 'militarisation' of the civil service but his attempts to introduce soldierly discipline in the bureaucratic ranks were only moderately successful. TNA, Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1938, TNA, C 58422055, FO 417/38.

[205] Chojnowski, 'Ignacy Moscicki', 227.

[206] Reports from 1936, 1937 and 1938., Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1936, TNA, C 52257555, FO 417/35; Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, C 252555, FO 417/37; Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1938, TNA, C 58422055, FO 417/38.

of the Armed Forces whose peacetime activity should have centred on defence planning.[207]

For nearly a decade after its creation, this complicated system of dual responsibility appeared to work; but only because Jozef Pilsudski was both Inspector and Minister, exercising full control over planning, administration and command of the Armed Forces. The Marshal's successor to the General Inspectorate, Edward Rydz-Smigly, immediately attempted to free his office from the nominal oversight of the Ministry of Military Affairs. He succeeded in May 1936, when the President decreed himself the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and made the General Inspector responsible to him personally.[208] Thus, the Ministry of Military Affairs was relegated to the back seat. Minister Kasprzycki was required to countersign all new laws, decrees and regulations pertaining to the Armed Forces but had little to no control over their content.[209] GISZ also had a say on military budget and cost allocation and it was the General Inspector's rather than the Minister's prerogative to initiate the meetings of the National Defence Committee (KOP) which, in addition to the two, included the President, the Prime-Minister, Foreign and Interior Ministers and the Finance Minister.[210]

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[207] Presidential decree from 6 August 1926, established something known as the 'two track system' and created the office of the General Inspector of the Armed Forces. *Dziennik Ustaw RP*, No. 79 (1926), sections 444 and 445.

[208] Presidential decree from 9 May 1936. *Dziennik Ustaw RP*, No. 38, section 286.

[209] Examples of regulations drafted by the General Inspectorate for the Armed Forces between 1936 and 1939 include: Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (thereafter abbreviated to CAW), New Conscription Law, Biuro Inspekcji GISZ, sygn. I.302.4.89, 1-296; CAW, Presidential Decree on new rules of procurement and provisioning, GISZ, sygn. I302.4.81 and CAW, Ordinances regulating the National Defence Fund (FON), GISZ, I. 302.4.84).

[210] The GISZ collection held at the Central Military Archive in Warsaw (CAW) includes eight budget estimates drafts for the period between 1927/28 and 1936/37. CAW, GISZ, sygn. I.302.4.1792-1796. The General Inspectorate was also invited to have the last word on the 1936 amendments to officers' pension provisions. CAW, Biuro Inspekcji GISZ, sygn. I.302.4.85.

In the previous paragraphs we explained the 'two track system' of command and how the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs was intended to be more powerful than a conventional European War Ministry. Similarly, the competencies of the General Staff also differed. However, this time it was the Polish organ that was more limited than its counterparts. The General Staff's only task was war-planning, this included carrying out strategic work (drawing operational, mobilisation and provisioning plans) as well as ensuring that the troops were adequately trained and equipped, and that the formations scattered across the country were able to communicate and act as a cohesive Armed Force. All Staff activity was overseen by the Chief of the General Staff who was handpicked by the General Inspector of the Armed Forces and acted as his deputy.

Unsurprisingly then, replacing the Chief of the General Staff was one of the first personnel changes undertaken by Rydz-Smigly after taking office.[211] He selected Waclaw Stachiewicz, nominally the last of 'Pilsudski's generals,'[212] a legionary, educated in France and with an extensive staff experience, which included roles in both the General Staff and the General Inspectorate.[213] Stachiewicz's elder brother Juliusz, also a general, was by all accounts, an extremely gifted officer and much

[211] Stachiewicz became the new Chief of Staff on 5 Jane 1935 and the speed of this turn around reportedly really put out his predecessor Gasiorowski. Note from 27 June 1935 in Tytus Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka (1935-1945)* [*Jan Szembek's Diary and Papers*], Vol. I, (London, 1964), 326.

[212] Even as his health continued to deteriorate Pilsudski continued to look over and approve officer promotions. Lepecki, *Pamietnik*, 273. Waclaw Stachiewicz was the last general whose promotion was signed by Pilsudski, on 26 January 1935.

[213] Interestingly, he was first nominated for strategic work by Edward Rydz-Smigly who, in 1918, entrusted him the Staff at the Central Command of the Polish Military Organisation. Bogdan Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz: Wspomnienie* [*Remembering general Waclaw Stachiewicz*], (Warszawa, 2004), 79.

liked by Pilsudski.[214] Indeed, some said that the Marshal intended to give the General Staff to the older of the brothers.[215] In the end it was the younger Stachiewicz who would be in charge of the Staff in the run up to the Second World War.

The nomination is said to have come as a surprise to both the general himself and the members of the officer corps.[216] Contravening the rule that the Chief of the General Staff should at least hold the rank of Lieutenant General, Rydz-Smigly put many a nose out of joint. Not only was Stachiewicz 'a mere' Brigadier General but he had only held this rank for six months before his promotion. To top it off, he was younger than his counterparts and virtually unknown in the capital, having spent the previous eight years in Vilnius and provincial Czestochowa.[217]

Whether Rydz-Smigly purposely upset his generals is unclear. He might just have been looking for someone hard working and compliant; someone who would not use his formal military knowledge and Rydz-Smigly 's lack thereof in an argument with his principal.[218] However, Stachiewicz's total lack of political ambition, seen as distraction from strategic work might have also played a part. The general's famous loathing of 'networking' and schmoozing aristocrats, politicos and foreign diplomats

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[214] Pilsudski was the Godfather of Julian Stachiewicz's only son Mieczyslaw. Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 70; When Pilsudski was told about Juliusz Stachiewicz's premature death on 20 September 1934, he insisted that he was kept up all night by the clomping 'Julek's' (a diminutive form of Juliusz) invisible boots when the general's ghost 'came to say goodbye to his Commandant.' Waclaw Jedrzejewicz and Jan Cisek, *Kalendarium zycia Jozefa Pilsudskiego 1867-1935* [*The life of Jozef Pilsudski 1867-1935*], Vol. III, (Warszawa, 1994), 196.

[215] Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 71.

[216] Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 77.

[217] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading* Personalities in Poland, 1 Jan. 1938, TNA, C 58422055, FO 417/38.

[218] Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 78.

made him an ideal chief of a Staff which would a play second fiddle to Rydz-Smigly's General Inspector.[219]

In the end Stachiewicz proved an extremely loyal subordinate and an excellent executor of his superior's plans for the modernisation of the Polish Armed Forces. Practical and very focused, the Chief of General Staff continuously lobbied for an increase in the military budget. He also originated new fund-rising initiatives such as the Rambouillet armaments loan, which strengthened the Franco-Polish alliance favoured by Rydz-Smigly.[220] Himself an outsider, Rydz-Smigly surrounded himself with other outsiders, some of whom, like Waclaw Stachiewicz, were quite happy on the sidelines. Indeed, he reportedly repeatedly refused approaches by his politically engaged old companions to engage in public life.[221] Others resented their place outside Pilsudski's innermost of circles and often felt that they were passed over for promotions by other 'Colonels.'[222]

Adam Koc and Boguslaw Miedzinski**,** two other prominent supporters of Smigly-Rydz-Smigly, belonged to the second category. Rydz-Smigly's former comrades from the Legions, they too spent the 1930s on the fringes of the 'Colonels' Group'

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[219] Alluded to by general Gasiorowski in a conversation with Szembek. *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka*, Vol. 1, 326. This is confirmed by Wanda Stachiewicz who mentioned it in her diary several times. For example on 24 March 1939, Mrs Stachiewicz wrote: 'Dinner at ambassador Noel's (…) Wacek [a diminutive form of Waclaw] was furious he had to attend.' Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 26.

[220] PISM, Juliusz Lukasiewicz's statement for the Winiarski Commission, 22 Nov. 1943, A.11.49/cz/3/11.

[221] Bogdan Stachiewicz suspected that some legionaries resented this and their opposition might have caused his father's late promotion to general. Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 76.

[222] Waclaw Jedrzejewicz's characterisation of Rydz-Smigly's associates. Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia*, 268; Bogdan Stachiewicz agreed that opposition from politically engaged legionaries might have explained his father's late promotion to general. The reason was W. Stachiewicz's constant denial to participate in any public activities. Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz*, 76.

and rose to power after throwing their lot with the new General Inspector. After an unsuccessful attempt to install Koc as Prime Minister in 1935, Rydz-Smigly asked him to write the manifesto for and serve as leader of his political platform, the Camp of National Unity (OZN).[223] The OZN formed in 1937 unsuccessfully tried to replace Pilsudski's, now dissolved, Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government (BBWR). Adam Koc was also the founder and, until 1931, editor of the daily *Gazeta Polska*, a pro-Sanacja paper.[224] He was succeeded as editor by Boguslaw Miedzinski who initially maintained the publication's Pilsudskite sympathies but later moved it to the right and it increasingly became a mouthpiece for OZN and Rydz-Smigly's clique. Miedzinski left *Gazeta* in 1938 to become the Speaker of the Sejm.

Unsurprisingly, while Rydz-Smigly purged the Staff, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs changed little. Theoretically, Beck's closest colleague should have been his deputy Jan Szembek but their scheduled weekly meetings were often postponed or cancelled. Szembek's repeated applications to Beck's secretary to needle the Minister had varying effect.[225] And the deputy minister privately complained that he was not consulted and generally kept in the dark about the changes in Poland's foreign policy.[226] This scarcity of contact is confirmed by Szembek's diaries, which meticulously record his daily conversations.

On his part, Beck seemed happy with his deputy and never saw the need to replace him. Waclaw Zbyszewski suggested this was out of convenience but it is also possible that Beck did not want to remove anyone who was so explicitly chosen

[223] Komarnicki, (ed.) *Diariusz i Teki*, 377, 381 and 390.
[224] Other Sanacja titles included: *Kurier Poranny, Narod* and *Rzad i Wojsko*.
[225] Starzenski attributed these cancellations to Beck's health problems. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 36.
[226] Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 255.

for him by Pilsudski.[227] Nominated on the same day, the two were so different that Beck's secretary, Pawel Starzenski wondered some years later if the late Marshal juxtaposed them on purpose.[228]

Beck's deputy was as fat and gourmand as the Minister was skinny and relaxed about food. He was also thirteen years older, decidedly more aristocratic and a career diplomat who cut his teeth in the Austria-Hungarian Foreign Service. Prior to his arrival at Wierzbowa (the location of the Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Szembek headed the Polish missions in Budapest, Brussels and Bucharest. Never considered for his dream posting: Paris, Szembek was instead offered Berlin in spring of 1939.

The rapid deterioration of Polish-German relations prevented the Berlin posting from happening but had Beck ever wanted to replace Szembek, count Edward Raczynski, the Polish Ambassador to the Court of St James, would have been one of the possible candidates. Indeed, according to Raczynski himself, in June 1938, Beck talked to him about becoming his second deputy,[229] but in the end the ambassador remained in London.

One of the few who were on first name terms with the Minister, Edward Raczynski was undoubtedly one of Beck's favourites.[230] His boss not only praised the

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[227] Ibid., 255.
[228] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 36.
[229] Edward Raczynski, *W sojuszniczym Londynie: Dziennik Ambasadora Edwarda Raczynskiego 1939-1945* [*In allied London: Diary of Ambassador Edwards Raczynski 1939-1945*, (London, 1997), 18.
[230] The other ambassadors who were on first name bases with the Minister were Juliusz Lukasiewicz and Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski. The former knew Beck from the time of his ill-fated posting to Paris while the latter, was a cavalry companion who was hand-picked for the mission in Rome in 1938. Romeyko, *Wspomnienia o Wieniawie*, 40.

ambassador's 'diplomatic skill'[231] but also 'trusted Raczynski's political judgment' and believed that he 'could implement the new [Polish] policy with force and finesse.'[232] But Raczynski was not just a highly competent diplomat and administrator; he was, perhaps more importantly, a committed Anglophile. Educated in the London School of Economics and previously married to an MP's daughter, Lady Joyous Markham, Raczynski did not have the 'inferiority complex' Beck detested in his diplomats. In 1939 he proved instrumental in the signing of the Anglo-Polish alliance.

So instead of going to Raczynski, an informal second deputy ministership was, in 1938, given to Miroslaw Arciszewski, the former Polish representative to Bucharest.[233] Beck never defined the responsibilities of either of his deputies. By spoken arrangement, Arciszewski was entrusted with economic and budgetary issues and represented Beck at the government's Economic Committee but he later described his role as being predominantly a 'Szembek's double': a deputy's deputy. In busy times or in Szembek's absence, the second deputy undertook 'dealing with foreign diplomats, issuing secondary instructions and de-briefing of Polish representatives when they visited Warsaw.'[234] Interestingly, it was Arciszewski, not Szembek, who held a series of 'last chance' meetings with the increasingly absent German ambassador, Hans von Moltke in June 1939.

According to a contemporary, Arciszewski – a short man with enormous 'wet' eyes – was 'nice and kind, intelligent' but also 'romantic, sentimental and a dreamer,

[231] Jadwiga Beck, widow of Minister Jozef Beck in London, to Jan Weinstein, retired Polish diplomat and archivist in London, 5 Jan. 1972, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/35.
[232] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 265.
[233] He was never formally appointed.
[234] The meetings, arranged through the Bulgarian minister, Troyanov, were Beck's last attempts to re-start negotiations with Germany. PISM, Miroslaw Arciszewski's, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, A.11.49/Cz/3/I.

the opposite of a cold, suspicious, calculating and cynical professional diplomat.'[235] Yet, his career in Bucharest proved that looks could be deceiving and this unprepossessing man proved to be an intriguer of quite the first caliber. Indeed, he played an important role in the 1936 removal and expulsion of the pro-Soviet Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu.[236] Beck, who loathed Titulescu and was concerned that Poland might lose an important ally, generally approved of Arciszewski's involvement with the Romanian opposition and the ambassador's heavy lobbying against the Foreign Minister at the Royal Court.[237] Marshal Rydz-Smigly was less enthusiastic, not least because, regardless of their final outcome, Arciszewski's unsubtle maneuvers alienated France.[238]

Interestingly, according Wiktor Drymmer (Personnel Director at the Foreign Ministry), Arciszewski's nomination had less to do with his Romanian 'success' and more with Polish intelligence concerns that his Russian wife, Eugenia, was a Soviet informant.[239] The suspicions were allegedly confirmed by a Soviet defector Fyodor Butenko in February 1938.[240] But, instead of being removed from the Foreign Service, Arciszewski was asked to divorce his wife and brought back to Warsaw so

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[235] Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach*, 161.

[236] Romania and Poland had an anti-Soviet alliance dating back to 1921.

[237] In his statement to the Winiarski Commission, Beck's predecessor August Zaleski suggested that the Polish government financed the fascist Iron Guard during this period. However, this statement is not backed by existing records and thus likely to be just malicious gossip. PISM, August Zaleski's, former Minister for Foreign Affairs, statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 24 Feb. 1941, A.11.49/Cz/3/III.

[238] Komarnicki, (ed.) *Diariusz i Teki*, 360, 364 and 379.

[239] Wiktor Tomir Drymmer, *W sluzbie Polsce* [*In Poland's service]*, (Warszawa, 1998), 176; For information on Soviet agents in Polish administrative and military structures refer to Pawel Wieczorkiewicz, 'Uwagi o dzialalnosci agentury sowieckiej na odcinku polskim po roku 1921' ['Comments on the activity of the Soviet intelligence network on Polish territory after 1921'] in Piotr Kolakowski and Andrzej Peplonski (ed.), *Polski wywiad wojskowy 1918-1939* [*Polish military intelligence 1918-1939*], (Torun, 2006), 110.

[240] Lukasz Ulatowski, 'Niezbrzycki – Wybrane aspekty biografii wywiadowczej kierownika Referatu 'Wschod'' ['Niezbrzycki – Selected elements of intelligence biography of the head of the 'Eastern' Department'], Proceedings of the *Kadry decyduja o wszystkim* [*Personnel is crucial to everything*] Conference in Wroclaw, 22 September 2012.

the authorities could 'keep and eye on him'. It is possible that he owed this favourable treatment to good relations with Beck, who reportedly supported him as a Minister of Propaganda candidate in summer of 1939.[241] Arciszewski quickly lost the Minister's favour when it transpired that he never finalised his divorce and secretly maintained his relationship with his wife.

Two deputies in tow, Beck eventually came to regard someone else entirely as an adviser and confidant – a de facto deputy. This someone was Count Michal Lubienski, the Minister's Chef de Cabinet and an author of a 1939 memoir we mentioned earlier in this chapter. Micio, as he was known to friends, was, like Szembek and Arciszewski, a career diplomat. Previously a Charge d'Affaires in Riga, he was handpicked by the Minister and took office in April 1935.

Always pleasant, smiling, charming and intelligent Lubienski made an excellent gatekeeper and his contemporaries were unanimously complimentary about him.[242] However, it was under his directorship that Beck's private office became the universal, central department of the Foreign Ministry. Indeed, it was there, not in the Political Department, that Poland's foreign policy doctrine was really developed. This, as observed by Beck's personal secretary Starzenski, meant that all issues could be swiftly dealt with in one central place.[243] But the system had one big drawback – it gave Beck an excuse to keep the Ministry's senior civil servants at arms' length.

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[241] Drymmer, *W sluzbie*, 177.
[242] Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i* ludziach, 258; also Stanislaw Schmitzek and Stefan Lubomirski quoted in Piotr Lossowski, *Dyplomacja*, 203.
[243] Starzenski, 35

For although the Minister did organise briefings for his 'General Staff', they were irregular and sporadic, called only in times of crisis or heightened activity.[244] Day to day, Beck's interaction with even the most senior civil servants in the ministry was minimal. This, as pointed by Miroslaw Arciszewski, meant that '[t]hey were never able to understand Beck's way of thinking, ask him questions and coordinate the work of different departments.'[245]

When Beck's secretary Pawel Starzenski completed the draft of his manuscript *Trzy lata z Beckiem*, he asked four men whom he considered closest to and most familiar with the minister and his policy to comment on it.[246] We have already discussed two of the four, Michal Lubienski and Edward Raczynski. The remaining two – Juliusz Lukasiewicz and Jozef Lipski, were, like Raczynski, Poland's representatives in the capitals of European great powers: Lukasiewicz in Paris and Lipski in Berlin. Paris was Lukasiewicz's first and last foreign posting. He originally arrived there in 1922, alongside a young military attaché - Jozef Beck – and although Lukasiewicz's time as the First Secretary of the Polish legation was less tumultuous that that of his future boss, he did not stay on the Seine for much longer. After leaving in 1923, he would not return for over a decade.

Back in Poland, Beck's and Lukasiewicz's professional paths parted slightly but their friendship struck in Paris continued. Indeed, in 1932, after becoming the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Beck recommended Lukasiewicz to Pilsudski as a

[244] Miroslaw Arciszewski's, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/I.
[245] Miroslaw Arciszewski's, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/I.
[246] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*. 11.

candidate for a new ambassador in Moscow. Three years later, he was hand picked again. This time the destination was Paris.

Lukasiewicz's return to Paris coincided with Marshal Rydz'-Smigly's attempts to rejuvenate the ailing Franco-Polish alliance. And considering that the previous ambassador, Alfred Chlapowski, was quite inactive and reportedly held in poor regard a in the Quai d'Orsay, the Marshal Rydz-Smigly probably approved of Beck's decision to recall him.[247] Indeed, with well-known socialist sympathies, Lukasiewicz could have been considered the perfect representative to France governed by the Front Populaire.[248] And France, having recently been taken aback by the remilitarisation of Rhineland, became more interested in its eastern ally. But Rydz-Smigly's September 1936 visit quickly showed that the new ambassador saw more eye-to-eye, with his Foreign Minister than with the distinguished guest he was escorting. Lukasiewicz not only disliked French high-handedness; he also doubted France's overall reliability as an ally.[249]

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[247] Jan Szembek's diary suggests that Rydz-Smigly made his displeasure with Chlapowski known as early as October 1935. As on 29 October Rydz-Smigly's associate Adam Koc bemoaned Chlapowski's 'narrow-mindedness' and preoccupation with the interests of Polish landed aristocracy which made him an 'obstacle' to Franco-Polish financial agreement. Komarnicki, (ed.) *Diariusz i Teki*, 389-390.

[248] Lukasiewicz's Socialist sympathies dated back to his student days in St Petersburg where he was active in a number of left-leaning organisation and an editor of a socialist newspaper *Glos Mlodych.* Waclaw Jedrzejewicz and Henryk Bulhak, *Dyplomata w Paryzu 1936-1939: Wspomnienia i dokumenty Juliusza Lukasiewicza ambasadora Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej* [*Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939: Memoir and papers of Juliusz Lukasiewicz Ambassador of the Polish Republic*], (London, 1989), 8.

[249] Refer to Chapter Three, 124 – 125, for a detailed account of the visit. For thorough studies of French policy in the 1930s and Franco-Polish relations based on the French archives, see Martin Alexander, *The Republic in Danger. General Maurice Gamelin and the politics of French defence, 1933 – 1940*, (Cambridge, 1992) and Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace. Intelligence and Policy Making 1933 – 1939*, (Oxford, 2000).

Lukasiewicz never managed to forge a good working-relationship with the French Foreign Ministry, something that can be only partly attributed to his minister's hostility to France. Another Polish diplomat with Parisian experience, Waclaw Zbyszewski, suspected that the ambassador's abrupt and somewhat patronising manner was also to blame.[250] Georges Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister between 1938 and 1940, seemed to particularly dislike Lukasiewicz, who of course reciprocated the feeling.[251] Misdemeanours like the publication of his pamphlet *Polska jest mocarstwem*,[252] in the eve of the Czechoslovak crisis naturally did nothing to reduce the tension between the ambassador and Bonnet. The latter eventually all but banned Lukasiewicz from the Quai d'Orsay and, using the pretext of a unified Anglo-French response to German aggression, started dealing with ambassador Raczynski in London.[253]

Unlike his counterpart in Paris, the Polish ambassador in Berlin, Jozef Lipski, did not write pamphlets supporting Beck's foreign policy doctrine, but his hard work and professionalism nevertheless made him one of the minister's favourite ambassadors.[254] Born in Breslau in Lower Silesia, Lipski, like Raczynski, was a Prussian subject. As a youth, he flirted with the Polish independence movement but was not a Pilsudskite.[255] Indeed, he spent most of the First World War in Switzerland - studying law in Lausanne. Having graduated in 1919, Lipski joined the newly

[250] Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o sprawach i ludziach*, 124.
[251] In conversation, on 27 August 1939, with the French Premier Daladier, Lukasiewicz reportedly described working with Bonnet as 'extremely difficult.' Jedrzejewicz and Bulhak, *Dyplomata w Paryzu*, 314-315.
[252] *Poland is a Great Power.*
[253] Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o sprawach i ludziach*, 124.
[254] The Polish Legation in Berlin was lifted to the rank of an Embassy in October 1934.
[255] Lipski was a member of Towarzystwo Tomasza Zana (TTZ) a non-militant Polish movement named after the poet Tomasz Zan – one of the founders of the 19th c. Philomatic movement.

formed Polish diplomatic service where he remained an apolitical civil servant until 1939.[256]

Readers will have noticed that Lipski's arrival in Berlin coincided with Adolf Hitler's accession to power and an ostensible thaw in Polish-German relationship. The Polish embassy suddenly found the Auswartiges Amt easier to deal with and Pilsudski seized the opportunity to 'normalise' Warsaw's relations with Berlin. An experienced and skilled negotiator, Lipski played an important part in drafting the 1934 Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact and was, alongside Beck, one of its Polish signatories.[257]

Interestingly, like his Paris-posted, counterpart Lukasiewicz, Lipski too overlapped with Beck during his first brief foray into diplomacy. Unlike Lukasiewicz, however, Lipski did not seem to strike the same kind of friendship with the future minister.[258] And while Beck valued Lipski's skills and experience, he did not see the ambassador as more than just an executor of his, Beck's, directives.[259] That this was a misjudgment will become evident in later chapters.

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[256] Immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, Lipski volunteered for the Polish Army in France and, in 1940, was transferred to the Staff of the Commander in Chief, Wladyslaw Sikorski. Notebook. Considering Sikorski's and his government's hostility the openly pro-Sanacja Lukaszewicz, this staffing decision could be seen as a tribute to Lipski's professional integrity.

[257] He had previously represented Poland during the conferences in Locarno (1925), Hague (1929 and 1930) and Lausanne (1932). For the details of the negotiations for the 1934 Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact, see Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933* – 36, (Chicago, 1970), 57 – 73; and Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark. European International History 1933 – 1939*, (Oxford, 2013), 62 – 65.

[258] Perhaps this could be attributed to Lipski being a more seasoned diplomat by then. Before coming to Paris, he had already completed a three year posting in London.

[259] Jadwiga Beck, widow of Minister Jozef Beck in London, to Jan Weinstein, retired Polish diplomat and archivist in London, 5 Jan. 1972, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/35.

As early as in July 1937, Lipski had started disagreeing with certain aspects of Beck's policy towards Germany.[260] The differences between the Minister and his ambassador sharpened in 1938 around Munich and the Polish action in Czechoslovakia. Lipski repeatedly attempted to resign but Beck consistently refused to accept these resignations. Indeed, it was not until May 1939 – long after direct contact between the Polish ambassador and the German Foreign Minister all but ceased - that Beck started looking for a replacement. But, as we now know, he did not manage to find one in time.

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At the onset of this chapter, the author compared the complex interplay of personalities in interwar Poland to an exposition. It's purpose has been to enable readers to follow the analysis this doctoral thesis, to appreciate the organizational complexity of the Polish military leadership, and to understand how personal clashes could contribute to the breakdown of civil-military relations in the critical second half of the 1930s. The two leading personalities, Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly and Jozef Beck, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, were introduced by way of character sketches. And the juxtaposition of their different backgrounds, career paths and, most importantly, relationships with Jozef Pilsudski give an insight into the origins of their future conflict which we see develop in the following chapter.

As well as with the main subjects of this study, the readers have become acquainted with a selection of their closest associates and some key players in Polish

[260] Over the bilateral, Polish-German minority treaty. The negotiations are described in more detail in Chapter Four, 153 – 157.

politics in the second half of the 1930s. A glossary of personalities mentioned is provided at the front of this thesis.

Chapter Three: *Cracks in the system: May 1935 – 1936*

In the previous chapters, I described the events following Marshal Pilsudski's May 1926 Coup, the key Sanacja personalities who came to dominate the Polish political scene for the decade afterwards and the Pilsudskite reorganisation of public life. This included the militarisation of Poland's Civil Service and changes to the organisation of the Armed Forces. I have also outlined the significance of the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact concluded on 26 January 1934.

By May 1935, the Sanacja movement had been in power for almost a decade and Poland's Pilsudskite regime seemed firmly in place. However, this chapter will show that while the state functioned smoothly when all the power was concentrated in Marshal Pilsudski's hands, once he was gone it took only few months for the system he had created to become inoperable because of the rupture between Poland's Foreign Ministry and the General Inspector of the Armed Forces.

The views of Beck's adversaries who joined the government in exile came to dominate Polish post-war émigré historiography of the 1930s. People like General Sikorski, Wincenty Witos and even Beck's predecessor and successor August Zaleski did not agree with Jozef Beck's foreign policy and laid most of the blame for the disaster of September 1939 on his shoulders.[261]

[261] See, for example Anita Prazmowska, *Britain, Poland and the Eastern Front, 1939*, (Cambridge, 2004) and *Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Second World War*, (Basingstoke, 2000); also Witold Ipohorski-Lenkiewicz, *Minister z Palacu Bruehla: U zrodel Drugiej Wojny Swiatowej* [*The Minister from the Bruehl Palace: Origins of the Second World War*], (Buenos Aires, 1943). However, Marek Kornat argues that in most areas, Beck's policy was a continuation of Zaleski's doctrine. See Marek Kornat, *Polityka Rownowagi 1934-1939. Polska miedzy Wschodem a Zachodem* [*The Policy of Equilibrium 1934-1939. Poland between the East and the West*], (Krakow, 2007).

The Communist era historians adopted a similarly critical attitude, the only difference being that their criticism extended to the entire Sanacja establishment. Out of a political motivation to discredit the pre-war regime, scholars condemned the previous rulers' lack of foresight and character flaws.[262] Ryszard Mirowicz's comprehensive biography of Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly was one such study and the author's allusions to a conflict between the General Inspector of the Armed Forces, Rydz-Smigly and Beck were later dismissed as insignificant by contemporary historians.[263] However, archival sources analysed in this chapter demonstrate that, contrary to the orthodox view (1) a rift between Rydz-Smigly and Beck developed between 1935 and 1936 and (2) this conflict continued until the break out of the Second World War and contributed to the break-up of the authoritarian regime built by Pilsudski following the May 1926 coup.

The break up of the relationship can be analysed in three phases: (1) 'The War of Succession', which outlines the formation of General Rydz-Smigly's, President Moscicki's and Prime Minister Slawek's cliques and their subsequent squabbles which led to the formation of the Koscialkowski government; (2) the period between November 1935 and September 1936, which witnessed the marginalisation of Slawek and the 'Colonels', Rydz-Smigly and Moscicki's assault on the 1934 Constitution, the former's growing political appetite and an open challenge to Beck and finally (3) the first months of what Cat-Mackiewicz described as '*Rydzelite* –

[262] See, for example, Olgierd Terlecki, *Pulkownik Beck* [*Colonel Beck*], (Krakow, 1985) or Stefania Stanislawska, *Wielka i mala polityka Jozefa Becka, marzec – maj 1938* [*The grand and small politicies of Jozef Beck, March – May 1938*], (Warszawa, 1962].

[263] See, for example, Ryszard Mirowicz, *Edward Rydz-Smigly: Dzialalnosc wojskowa i polityczna* [*Edward Rydz-Smigly: Military and political activity*], (Warszawa, 1988), 143.

quarter-totalitarianism',[264] which begins with Rydz-Smigly's visit to Paris – his first open foray into Polish foreign affairs - and his rapid promotion from Divisional General to Marshal in 48 hours.

However, let us start before the system became dysfunctional, in early 1935, when Marshal Pilsudski was still alive and evidently set on preserving the *status quo*.

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Pilsudski's failing health had begun to get the attention of foreign diplomats in January 1935. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador to Warsaw, for instance, mused that month over the possible scenarios that would ensue following Marshal Pilsudski's death or retirement.[265] By then, the bad state of the Polish leader's health was common knowledge and he had, by and large, withdrawn from public life following his collapse during the Independence Day celebrations of the previous year and even though very few people realised just how dire the Marshal's condition really was, speculation about Poland without Pilsudski became one of the favourite conversation topics of the foreign representatives accredited in Warsaw. According to Kennard's dispatch, the majority of diplomats believed that Pilsudski, aware of his own impending demise, would nominate a successor. Were that the case, they argued, the most likely man to take over as Poland's new military dictator would be, Pilsudski's old POW (Polish Military Organisation) comrade, General Sosnkowski. Some also feared that in the event of Pilsudski's sudden death, the Minister for

[264] Phrase coined by Cat-Mackiewicz in his papers. Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz, *Polityka Becka*, (Kraków, 2009), 118.

[265] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to John Simon, Foreign Secretary in London, 29 Jan. 1935, TNA, C 8228755, FO 417/35.

Foreign Affairs Jozef Beck might attempt to seize power in a 'coup de main'.[266] Polish observers regarded such a power grab as extremely unlikely, citing Beck's overall lack of popularity and the likely opposition from the Army as the main obstacles. As this chapter will demonstrate, while they were correct in their assessment of Beck's capabilities, no one foresaw the power struggle that would follow the Marshal's death or indeed, its unlikely victor.

Pilsudski had been Poland's dictator since 1926 and his death on 12 May 1935 left a power vacuum in Polish politics. Even during his last days, when the old Marshal was reportedly only fit to converse or attempt work for an hour or so a day, his closest collaborators were ultimately able to seek his advice or approval for their policies. It was still Pilsudski's authority that gave his associates' actions credibility. Indeed, some of the Marshal's critics, such as Beck's dismissed predecessor Zaleski, argued that following his first bout of illness in 1931, Pilsudski's role was reduced to that of merely a smokescreen for the Colonels' Clique.[267] Naturally, given his circumstances, Zaleski's opinion cannot be regarded as fully objective. As a matter of fact, one could argue that Pilsudski's decision to entrust the management of foreign policy to someone whom, unlike Zaleski, he trusted completely was a sign that he did not forfeit his power over Poland and wanted to ensure a continuity of Polish policy that would extend beyond his life.[268] As we shall see, Jozef Beck, who

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[266] Ibid.

[267] Jerzy M. Nowakowski, *Walery Slawek (1979-1939): Zarys Biografii Politycznej* [*Walery Slawek (1879-1939): Sketch of his political biobraphy*], (Warszawa, 1988), 167.

[268] Pilsudski was certainly very pleased with Beck's performance as the Foreign Minister. Writing to Beck during his internment, Janusz Jedrzejewicz reminded the former minister of the praise he received from Pilsudski during the Marshal's meeting with Moscicki and all post-May 1926 Prime Ministers in the spring of 1934. JPI-London, Janusz Jedrzejewicz, former Polish Prime Minister interned in Romania, to Jozef Beck, former Polish Foreign Minister interned in Romania, 27 Feb.

sometimes alluded to being the bearer of Pilsudski's political 'last will', strongly favoured this interpretation.

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The War of Succession

> 'My Child... – the Commandant only used this phrase in moments of great emotion or his own weakness – My Child... What will they do to Poland after my death..? […] My Generals... My Generals...'[269]

With their leader gone, infighting broke out among the Sanacja elite. People whose positions within the system were directly linked to their close relationship with the Marshal, like Prime Minister Slawek and, to a lesser extent, Foreign Affairs Minister Beck, lost a great deal of their influence almost overnight, whereas those who, like President Ignacy Moscicki, were supposedly on their way out, could (successfully) fight for survival.

Very quickly, a clique – sometimes referred to as the Castle clique – formed around President Moscicki, who, relatively unmoved by the death, emerged as a true political and national leader. According to the diary of Jan Szembek, Beck's deputy, the very bereaved Beck was initially pleased with the way Moscicki had handled the crisis. He even commented that the President had 'lately been very privy' with the

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1940, *Kolekcja Becka*, Zes. 20/5/3/3.

[269] Excerpt from a conversation between Premier Janusz Jedrzejewicz and Pilsudski when the former presented his resignation. JPI-London, Irena Sokolnicka, Ambassadress in Istanbul, note, 13 Aug. 1940, *Kolekcja Ambassadora Michala Sokolnickiego*, Zes. 52/1.

Marshal and, was therefore entrusted with detailed guidance and instructions about the future of the national administration and lines of policy.[270]

Beck's approval of Moscicki's conduct withered away, however when the President used his newly strengthened position to challenge Walery Slawek. The reason why he was determined to neutralise Prime Minister Slawek was related to Pilsudski's widely known plans to replace the President with his old friend as soon as the new 1935 Constitution, which weakened the legislative branch of government, was passed.[271] Instead, Moscicki quickly made it clear that he was not, in fact, considering cutting his second term short and would serve until its end in 1940. An opportunity to marginalise Slawek presented itself when, following the summer 1935 parliamentary election, the Prime Minister presented the President with a customary resignation letter. Moscicki, having previously secured the support of the Marshal's successor at the head of the Armed Forces, General Rydz-Smigly, then, to everyone's surprise, accepted it and proceeded to form his 'own' government.[272]

As the resultant 'interregnum' infighting raged through the Sanacja circles, Beck managed to avoid choosing sides. He owed this special status to his close relationship with Pilsudski, something that was underwritten by being the last official to have spoken to the dying Marshal. Called out of a reception in honour of the visiting French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, Beck hurried in his white tie to

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[270] Tytus Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka* [*Jan Szembek's Diary and Papers*], Vol. 1, (London, 1964), 292.

[271] Pilsudski had reportedly told Moscicki that 'Once [he] is tired, Slawek should replace [him]' quoted in Slawomir Koper, *Zycie prywatne elit Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*Private life of the elites of the Second Polish Republic*] (Warszawa, 2009), 309.

[272] Ibid., 310.

the Belvedere. 'Aren't you chic, my boy!' - the Marshal, who then proceeded to give the Minister his last advice, greeted him. According to Beck himself it went like this:

'Well, my boy, aren't you afraid?' I replied: 'Commandant, men whom you have honoured with your confidence are never afraid.' - 'Good that you are not afraid – your task is difficult.' […] 'Well, my boy, for a certain time better stay idle and wait and see what all the others are going to do.'[273]

To some this conversation marked Beck out as the 'anointed' one - a bearer of Pilsudski's political 'last will'. It is reasonable to conclude, however, that had he been forced to declare his sympathies, he would have supported Slawek and the Colonels. Indeed, following the 1935 change of government, Beck initially refused to join the newly formed cabinet of Zyndram-Koscialkowski, appalled by Moscicki's and Rydz-Smigly's unceremonious deposition of Walery Slawek and unwilling to work in government with Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, with whom he often disagreed, and as we will see in later chapters, would continue to disagree with on foreign and domestic policy.[274] It was only after much soul searching, discussions with Rydz-Smigly, a heated exchange with President Moscicki and, significantly, a plea from the 'deposed' Slawek that he stay on that Beck agreed, albeit grudgingly, to remain at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[275] The shrewd collector of political gossip

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[273] Jozef Beck, *Final Report* (New York, 1957), 88.

[274] In his memoirs, Kwiatkowski would later write that Beck was a foreign policy 'dictator' who had fallen victim to a malady common amongst politicians: namely, that after 'many years of running a large and important government department, its Head would inevitably acquire not only routine and valuable experience, but also some psychological aberrations – caused equally by the flattery of his milieu as well as gradual deterioration of his self awareness.' Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, 'Jozef Beck', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 76, (1986), 22.

[275] Notes from Szembek's conversation with Lubienski on 21 Oct 1935. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i* Teki, Vol.1, 381; Diplomat-come-historian Wladyslaw Pobog-Malinowski claimed that after his argument with Moscicki, Beck once again discussed his resignation with Slawek who urged him to stay. Wladyslaw Pobog-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski* [*Modern political history of Poland*], Vol. 2, (Warszawa, 1990), 780-781.

and establishment priest, Bronislaw Zongollowicz, who had somehow obtained details of the late night conversation at Warsaw's Royal Castle, claims that Beck told Moscicki that he was only staying in the government on the President's orders but will take no responsibility for the policies it dictates.[276] Following his entry into Koscialkowski's government Beck collapsed from exhaustion and he likely suffered a minor breakdown. For the first month after he had officially taken office Beck was substituted by Szembek, something that fuelled a wave of gossip about the Minister's imminent departure. These rumours were no doubt greatly magnified by the indecent speed with which Rydz-Smigly was promoted.

To Warsaw's diplomatic community, Rydz-Smigly – who shied away from public life and whom they rarely met – seemed a member of Pilsudski's inner circle and a devoted follower of the Marshal's policy; Howard Kennard, for one, thought that Rydz-Smigly might take over Pilsudski's post of Minister of War. In hindsight, Rydz-Smigly's appointment as General Inspector of the Armed Forces appears natural, yet his position on the political periphery at the time meant that his rise came as a surprise to many.[277]

Despite Rydz-Smigly's brilliant victories during the Polish-Bolshevik war, the archives reveal that Pilsudski had not, for a long time, necessarily seen him as a potential future Commander in Chief. In 1922, writing his commendation of Rydz-Smigly in support of his proposal to award the young general the order of Virtutti

[276] Bronislaw Zongollowicz, *Dzienniki 1930-1936* [*Diaries 1930-1936*], (Warszawa, 2004), 683.
[277] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, *Leading Personalities in Poland*, 1 Jan. 1935, TNA, C 52257555, FO 417/35.

Militari, Pilsudski praised Rydz-Smigly's strong and responsible character but worried about three things: whether Rydz-Smigly had the ability to curb the other generals' grandiose ambitions, whether he had the ability to be an effective Commander in Chief and finally whether he could assess not just military strength but the 'nation's and the enemy's strength too'.[278] Moreover, as some historians point out, even in later years, Pilsudski was occasionally very critical of Rydz-Smigly whom he thought had no political talent.[279] The Marshal had even temporarily banished Rydz-Smigly to Vilnius in the aftermath of his involvement in the Lublin government.[280]

It was, of course, possible to win back Pilsudski's favour (that the Marshal had described Beck as an 'idiot' in 1926 did not stop Pilsudski from calling him 'dearest Beck' in 1934).[281] Rydz-Smigly's support of Sanacja during the May 1926 coup allowed him to return to Warsaw and be appointed as the regional Inspector of the Armed Forces. He did not, however, became one of the Marshal's 'nearest and dearest' and after his ill-fated early venture into politics Rydz-Smigly preferred to stay away from public life until Pilsudski died. It is quite possible that Pilsudski approved of Rydz-Smigly 's aversion to political intrigue, which, dormant under the Marshal's watchful eye, erupted in the battle to succeed him.[282] Janusz Jedrzejewicz recalls that, shortly before Pilsudski's death, Boguslaw Miedzinski organised a

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[278] JPI-London, Jozef Pilsudski, Marshal of Poland in Warsaw, 'Wniosek na odznaczenie orderem 'Virtutti Militari' II kl.' ['Motion to award a Second Class Virtuti Military decoration'], 1922, *Kolekcja Jozefa Pilsudskiego*, Zes. 1/11.

[279] Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne Lata Trzydzieste* [*The Beautiful Thirties*], (Warszawa, 2008), 262.

[280] Refer to Chapter Two, 77 and footnote 188.

[281] Koper, *Zycie prywatne*, 25; Mieczyslaw Lepecki, *Pamietnik adiutanta Marszalka Pilsudskiego* [*Marshal Pilsudski's Adjutant's Diary],* (Warszawa, 1987), 140.

[282] Refer to Chapter Two, 75 – 76.

meeting of prominent Pilsudskites including Antoni Matuszewski, Adam Koc and Henryk Flojar-Reichman, who asked Jedrzejewicz to lobby Moscicki in favour of making general Sosnkowski General Inspector of the Armed Forces. Jedrzejewicz declined on the grounds that choosing the nominee was solely the President's prerogative,[283] but would later admit that he already knew that the post would be entrusted to Rydz-Smigly on Pilsudski's instructions.[284] This was widely believed and the Marshal's widow Aleksandra agreed that her late husband had intended for Rydz-Smigly to succeed him at the head of the Polish Army.[285] He might have also mentioned it once to Slawek.[286]

In the end, whether on Pilsudski's orders or not, Edward Rydz-Smigly was appointed the next General Inspector of the Armed Forces within hours of the Marshal's death in May 1935 and spent the second half of the year trying to find his feet.

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Once the colonels had been neutralised, the initial truce between Moscicki and Rydz-Smigly evaporated and, using his high standing within the Army, the General started to gain the upper hand over the President. Indeed, as we shall see later, one could even say that he underwent a transformation from soldier to politician during those first few months in office.

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[283] Janusz Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie ideii – Fragmenty pamietnika i pism* [*In idea's service – Excerpts from diary and writings*], (London, 1972), 202.
[284] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 202.
[285] In her memoirs, Pilsudska writes that already in 1933, the Marshal expressed his wish for Rydz-Smigly to take over the Army when he is dead. Aleksandra Pilsudska, *Wspomnienia* [*Memoirs*], (London, 1985), 207.
[286] JPI-London, Irena Sokolnicka, Ambassadress in Istanbul, note, 3 Mar. 1961, *Kolekcja Ambassadora Michala Sokolnickiego*, Zes. 52/1.

One of the ways in which this new rivalry between the Castle (Moscicki's residence) and Wierzbowa (the General Inspectorate) manifested itself was in relation to the Foreign Ministry, and more specifically, both men's attitude to Beck. Moscicki wanted the Foreign Minister to stay in office and attempted unsuccessfully to limit Rydz-Smigly's ability to interfere in international affairs by reserving for himself the right to take executive foreign policy decisions and hold private council with Beck.[287]

The rapport between the Minister and the Inspector was obviously not as good. Indeed, soon after Rydz-Smigly's nomination, Beck admitted, in his typically indirect way,[288] that he worried that the relationship between the general and himself might be 'difficult'; and stressed to Szembek that the establishment of a mutual trust between the two of them was not something in which he took pleasure but 'a matter of national security'.[289]

According to the diary of Mieczyslaw Lepecki, Pilsudski's adjutant, Beck was the only official to whom 'the doors of the GISZ (General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces) always remained open' when the Marshal was still alive.[290] Once Rydz-Smigly took over at the institution, however, Beck's visits to the GISZ become more sporadic and this loosening of institutional ties filtered down to both men's subordinates. In the previous chapter we discussed the post-May Coup influx of young officers into public institutions and the irritation it caused among civil

[287] Moscicki insisted on this before approving Rydz-Smigly's confidante, Slawoj-Skladkowski's premiership nomination. See Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski, *Nie ostatnie slowo oskarzonego* [*The accused's one but last word*], (London, 1964), 149.
[288] Invoking the conflict between Count Aerenthal and the Austro-Hungarian military authorities.
[289] Beck's conversation with Szembek, 20 Oct 1935. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 379.
[290] Lepecki, *Pamietnik*, 140.

servants. We must, however, remember that having left the Armed Forces, those officers in mufti were also looked down upon by their former colleagues. This suspicious attitude did not make for good working relations between the two departments and a reshuffle at the head of the General Staff exacerbated the conflict. The gregarious General Janusz Gasiarowski, who was swiftly replaced by Rydz-Smigly's supporter Stachiewicz, complained that the cordial and close relationship between the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry was bound to change given his successor's lack of interest in diplomacy.[291]

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As I have already alluded to, and will later discuss in detail, one of the reasons why Beck and Rydz-Smigly's relationship could have been rocky was the general's ruthless purge of many of Beck's friends and confidants. One must also highlight their differing attitude to Pilsudski. Unlike Beck, Rydz-Smigly did not revere Pilsudski. Indeed, sources suggest quite the opposite. In his diary, Janusz Jedrzejewicz recalls a 1934 conversation with Rydz-Smigly that made him wonder whether the general was harbouring 'strong negative feelings towards the Marshal'.[292] While the diary does not elaborate on the subject, an explanation can be found in the papers of Ambassador Sokolnicki with whom Jedrzejewicz spent some time during World War II. Apparently, as late as 1934, Rydz-Smigly appeared to harbor resentment of an incident that took place in mid 1920s, when he felt Pilsudski

[291] Gosiarowski's conversation with Szembek on 27 Jun 1935. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 326.
[292] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 211.

had embarrassed him in front of other generals.[293] Rydz-Smigly had been so unsettled that he even attempted to challenge Pilsudski to a duel![294] What is more, as soon as the Marshal's health began to falter, Rydz-Smigly began, discreetly, to oppose his authority. Furthermore, according to the diary of General Kordian Zamorski, in a conversation in July 1932, Rydz-Smigly appeared to resent Pilsudski's rule and argued that 'he is obviously a mad-man, which once discovered, will make *us* [the regime?] a laughing stock for not realising this.'[295] Around the same time, Rydz-Smigly might have also been involved with a secret militaristic organisation called 'Orzel Bialy' (The White Eagle), which was ordered dissolved after Pilsudski found out about its existence.[296]

Beck, on the other hand, was one of Pilsudski's closest (if not *the* closest) associates and held his commander in high esteem. What is more, as we have seen in earlier chapters, until the Marshal's death Beck had near-autonomy in conducting Polish foreign relations. Indeed, a fellow diplomat Kajetan Morawski, argued that Beck had became 'a dictator, taking all foreign policy decisions and responsibility upon himself.'[297] Virtually unrestrained, the Minister had, much to the chagrin of some of his contemporaries, became Pilsudski's sole source of foreign policy information. With the exception of the Polish-Lithuanian conflict, when he relied on himself, the Marshal trusted Beck's interpretation of international events.[298]

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[293] Just before adjourning a staff meeting, Pilsudski came up to Rydz-Smigly and said 'A i z was Rydz, bedzie kiedys dobry *dormiszka* (?)' ['And you Rydz, will also one day became a good *dormiszka*']. JPI-London, Irena Sokolnicka, Ambassadress in Istanbul, to the Jozef Pilsudski Institute, 11 Jul. 1964, *Kolekcja Ambasadora Michala Sokolnickiego*. Zes. 52/1.

[294] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 211.

[295] Lepecki, *Pamietnik*, 11.

[296] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 211.

[297] Kajetan Morawski, *Tamten Brzeg: Wspomnienia I Szkice* [*The other bank: Memories and Sketches*], (Warszawa, 1996), 178.

[298] Andrzej Garlicki and Ryszard Swietek (ed.), *Kazimierz Switalski. Diariusz 1919-1935* [*Kazimierz*

Just once a year Beck presented the Sejm with a report on the aims and achievements of Polish foreign policy and seemingly had, whenever possible, tried to restrict the flow of diplomatic information within both the Foreign Ministry and the government. This became apparent when he was due to prepare a foreign policy brief for Premier Koscialkowski's first parliamentary speech. Since Beck was ill and unavailable at that time, his chief of staff, Lubienski, suggested that the PM refrain from talking about international problems until the Minister's return, but this was rejected by Szembek and the other Foreign Ministry directors. In the end it was decided that each of the department heads should prepare a briefing but when Szembek mentioned the speech while visiting the convalescing Beck, the Minister insisted on replacing them with a short statement of his own.[299]

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Beck's immediate absence after his entry into the Koscialkowski government set Warsaw's tongues wagging and many, correctly, took it as a sign that the minister's position was weakening. Some even went as far as saying that his days in the Foreign Ministry were numbered. And although those expecting a change of Foreign Minister were proven wrong, one could argue that the fact that even after returning from his sick leave in November 1935, Beck continued to spend long periods of time away from Warsaw greatly aided Rydz-Smigly's successful foray into Polish

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Switalski's Diary 1919-1935], (Warszawa, 1992), 660.

[299] Komarnicki, *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 377.

diplomacy.[300] One of Beck's fellow Pilsudskites – Kazimierz Switalski – had even once pointed out to Beck that the Foreign Ministry might suffer as a result of internal tension that had developed when he was attending to League of Nation's business.[301] Moreover, although Beck did not really seem to want to listen to Switalski, he was reportedly upset by Rydz-Smigly's uncertainty about the direction of Polish foreign policy.[302]

One area where Rydz-Smigly and Beck openly disagreed was the Polish position on Danzig. The Foreign Minister wanted to treat the problem of Danzig as separate from Polish-German affairs whereas Rydz-Smigly was convinced that relations with the Free City would remain a contentious issue between Warsaw and Berlin and that a German-Polish war was likely to result from a local conflict in the city.[303] This was not of course the only bone of contention. According to Witos's diary, Rydz-Smigly also disapproved of Beck's harsh foreign policy towards Czechoslovakia,[304] something that echoes in the reports of the Czechoslovak emissary to Warsaw, Juraj Slavik.[305] Slavik's close relationship with the French Ambassador Leon Noel might perhaps explain why the French hoped that Rydz-Smigly would be sympathetic towards their efforts to forge a Polish-Czechoslovak alliance. Furthermore, in the winter of 1935-36, Rydz-Smigly openly criticised the Foreign Ministry's passive

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[300] These absences were partly due to recovering from a relapse of his lung illness and partly, League of Nations activity which required long stays in Geneva. Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia prompted a whirl of diplomatic activity and engagement with the League.

[301] Garlicki and Swietek (ed.), *Kazimierz Switalski*, 678.

[302] Ibid., 678.

[303] Conversation between Szembek and Rydz-Smigly, 6 Jun. 1936. Tytus Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka* [*Jan Szembek's Diary and Papers*], Vol. 2, (London, 1965), 236.

[304] Wincenty Witos, *Moja Tulaczka* [*My Exile*], (Warszawa, 1967), 208.

[305] Jozef Kowalczyk, *Za kulisami wydarzen politycznych z lat 1936-1938 w swietle raportow posla Czechoslowacji w Warszawie i innych archiwaliow* [*Behind the scenes of the political events of 1936-1938 in the light of reports from the Czechoslovak emissary to Warsaw and other archival sources*], (Warszawa, 1976), 16.

acceptance of the dirty tricks and intrigue employed by the Polish emissary to Bucharest to remove the anti-Polish, Romanian Foreign Minister Titulescu.[306]

If Rydz-Smigly's constant criticism of Beck's policy was not enough to undermine the Minister, his position in the government was further weakened by the tension that had developed in Polish-German relations by summer 1935. Beck attempted to maintain stability in Poland's external affairs, but foreign governments' reaction to the news of Pilsudski's death, which could be described as a mixture of apprehension and hope, did not make his task easy.[307] In Paris, the French authorities made clear their hope that Pilsudski's death and the subsequent weakening of Beck would lead to better Franco-Polish relations and hoped that they might use Rydz-Smigly as a counterbalance for the unpopular Polish Minister.[308]

In Berlin, where services held in honour of the late Polish Marshal were particularly grand, the mood could not have been different and the authorities made it clear to Ambassador Lipski that they were worried about the possibility of a sudden turn-around in Polish-German relations.[309] Indeed, despite reassurances that

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[306] Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki* Vol. 1, 360.

[307] Shortly after Pilsudski's death, a short communiqué was sent out to all Polish diplomatic outposts, which stated that, for the past few years, Beck had effectively been shaping Polish foreign policy and that there would be no drastic change in approach. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki* Vol. 1, 327.

[308] The majority of Polish historians of the Franco-Polish relations share this view. See for example, Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 296 also Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 488. However, Nicole Jordan, argues that the Quai d'Orsay was not sympathetic to Noel's scheme to remove Beck and that Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos refused to discuss Beck's removal during Rydz-Smigly's visit. Indeed, when the matter was apparently raised by Rydz-Smigly himself, it was met with 'a remark almost discourteous in its significance.' Nicole Jordan, *The popular front and central Europe: the dilemmas of French impotence, 1918-1940*, (Cambridge, 1992), 147.

[309] Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America (thereafter JPIoA), Jozef Lipski, Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 15 May 1935, N/421/15/35 also JPIA, Jozef Lipski, Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 23 May 1935, JPIA, N/52/3. German insecurity may have been exacerbated by their unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Poles to enter into an anti-Soviet alliance. An idea floated by Goering during his hunting trip to Poland

Warsaw would not abandon her line of Polish-German rapprochement, Goering - who headed the German delegation to Pilsudski's funeral – requested meetings with both Moscicki and the newly nominated Head of the Armed Forces, Rydz-Smigly.[310] Soon after that the Polish authorities came into conflict to with Hjalmar Schacht who refused to settle the overdue German rail-transit fees.[311] Indeed, the situation was so bad that, on 6 July 1935 Szembek felt it necessary to issue a communiqué to all Polish diplomatic outposts, informing them that Beck had recently had a meeting with Hilter during which both men reasserted their mutual commitment to friendly Polish-German relations.[312]

What is more, evidence suggests that the differences between the Foreign Minister and the Chief of the Armed Forces must have quickly became common knowledge among Warsaw's elite circles, and found their way through to diplomatic reports. Mrs Beck, for example, recalls that when she and her daughter stayed behind in the German town of Reichenhall following her husband's July 1935 official visit to Berlin, she was showered with courtesies, attention and invitations to Goering and Hitler's villas.[313] During one such weekend, spent sailing with Goering, the German had surprised her with a question about Rydz-Smigly's supposed dislike of her

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in January 1935. Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe 1933-36*, (Chicago, 1970), 192-193.

310 JPIoA, Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 15 May 1935, N/421/15/35.

311 Raised by Lipski with Schacht on 13 June 1935, the funds were never recovered. JPIoA, Jozef Lipski, Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 13 Jun. 1935, G/3/8/35. Minister Beck thought at the time that the crisis was engineered by the anti-Polish elements within the Auswartiges Amt. However, Weinberg's analysis disproves this claim. He argues that 'the effort to precipitate a more serious crisis originated in Danzig and can be understood on the basis of directives from Hitler to Forster and Greiser.' Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy*, 192.

312 Communiqué from 6 Jul. 1935. Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London (thereafter PISM), A.11.49/N/5.

313 She received an open, chauffeur-driven white Mercedes as a gift from Hitler and was a little disappointed when her husband did not allow her to keep the car after the end of her holiday. Jadwiga Beck, *Kiedy Bylam Ekscelencja* [*When I was an Excellency*], (Warszawa, 1990), 36.

husband. Naturally, she disagreed.[314] And although Goering never mentioned Rydz-Smigly to Mrs Beck after this incident, the fact that he tried to verify the rumours indicates that the German leadership took them seriously and was worried about Beck's position weakening opposite Rydz-Smigly.[315]

Nevertheless, despite his mistrust of Germany, even Rydz-Smigly was initially interested in preserving the continuity in Polish-German relations, as demonstrated by his behaviour during the 1935 nomination crisis.[316] The General had repeatedly indicated that he did not believe a dramatic change of foreign policy doctrine would have been good for Poland.[317]

Some participants in the debate on Beck's and Rydz-Smigly's relationship see this, as well as the fact that Edward Rydz-Smigly did not push for Beck's removal, as indicating that he was not, overall, hostile to the Foreign Minister's line of policy.[318] Arguably, both men seem to have had a long and, to quote Beck himself, 'an extremely important and reassuring discussion' during the tense weekend of 12-13 October when he was uncertain about accepting his ministerial nomination.[319] However, we must try not to look at the events of late summer 1935 through the prism of the general's future popularity and remember that at the time of the first change of government after Pilsudski's death, Rydz-Smigly had barely been in office

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[314] Beck, *Kiedy bylam*, 40.
[315] Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy*, Vol. II, 248-249.
[316] When the Foreign Minister had finally accepted his nomination, Rydz-Smigly was reportedly extremely pleased and declared that 'he would not be so sure about Poland's international safety with anyone else.' PISM, Michal Lubienski, Chef de Cabinet to Minister Jozef Beck in Warsaw, to Edward Raczysnki, Polish Ambassador in London, 25 Nov. 1935, PISM, *Kolekcja Edwarda Raczynskiego*, 23/H/348.
[317] Szembek's conversation with Lubienski on 21 Oct 1935. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 381.
[318] See for example: Kornat, *Polityka równowagi*, 391.
[319] Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 370.

for three months and his position had yet to be established. Indeed, he was not even consulted about the proposed composition of the Koscialkowski government and was extremely displeased with some of the nominees, including the PM himself.[320] This lack of support would later directly contribute to the fall of Koscialkowski's government and the elevation of Rydz-Smigly 's protégé Skladkowski to the Premiership.

Notwithstanding Rydz-Smigly's lack of time in post, the aloof Colonel Beck was doubtless aided by the special relationship he enjoyed with Pilsudski. Beck clearly had Pilsudski's mandate to manage Polish diplomacy and for Rydz-Smigly to be seen to be openly disregarding the leader's instructions so soon after his death would have been foolish. According to one of his university friends, 'Edzio[321] was not very clever [...]'[322] but he certainly was not the total imbecile his critics like the late Mackiewicz would like us to believe. Indeed, another reason why Rydz-Smigly would have had little inclination to dispose of Beck laid in the fact that, despite his friendship with former Foreign Minister Zaleski, he had, at that point, limited ideas not just about Polish foreign policy but also concerning wider international relations.[323] Having spent his last few years as the regional General Inspector for the Armed Forces in Warsaw, he was doubtless aware that he was completely unprepared to immediately

[320] Rydz-Smigly's distrust of Koscialkowski and Kwiatkowski – both of whom were prominent Moscicki supporters – was common knowledge. Numerous political figures as well as the man himself, mused about the subject to Jan Szembek. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1 381; Rydz-Smigly's preference for Koc over Koscialkowski was also mentioned in Lubienski's private letter to Raczynski. PISM, Michal Lubienski, Chef de Cabinet to Minister Jozef Beck in Warsaw, to Edward Raczysnki, Polish Ambassador in London, 25 Nov. 1935, *Kolekcja Edwarda Raczynskiego*, 23/H/348.

[321] Common diminutive for Edward.

[322] Franciszek Studzinski, Rydz-Smigly's university room-mate quoted in Waclaw A. Zbyszewski *Gawedy o ludziach i czasach przedowjennych* [*Stories of people and times of the Antebellum*], (Warsaw: 2000), 62.

[323] During a casual exchange on 20 October 1935, minister Szembek would even enquire with Beck about the progress Rydz-Smigly was making, to which the Minister responded that he was getting the hang of things. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 380.

take control over Polish foreign policy. However, if one looks at the behaviour of Marshal Rydz-Smigly in the later part of the 1930s, it is obvious that he had been learning and insisted on being well informed about Poland's foreign policy. Indeed, the following pages refute Marek Kornat's argument that Beck's position in the driving seat of Polish diplomacy remained relatively strong not only because there was no one good enough to replace him but also because no other Polish leader possessed sufficient knowledge and understanding of the country's foreign relations.[324]

In this country political developments of the first magnitude usually come unheralded[325]

In a private letter of 25 November 1935 to Ambassador Edward Raczynski, Beck's Chief of Staff, Michal Lubienski, updated the London-based diplomat on the most recent developments in Poland's internal policy and shared the latest political gossip. Noting the continuing decline in the levels of public and parliamentary support for the Koscialkowski government, Lubienski told the Ambassador:

> A new power centre has started forming around general Rydz-Smigly. It would take too long to explain why this is happening but the most important reason is, certainly, the fact that out of all the people holding the key offices in Poland, e.g.: the President, Prime Minister, ministers

[324] This is the central argument in 'Niedoszle dymisje ministra Jozefa Becka – Pogloski, Dokumenty, Interpretacje']' ['Minister Beck's near-resignations – Hearsay, Documents, Interpretations'], in Kornat, *Polityka Rownowagi*, 387 – 427.

[325] Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor at the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 20 Jul. 1936. TNA, C 55484955, FO 417/36.

> [and] parliamentary leaders, general Rydz-Smigly has the most remarkable character and most outstanding personality. One is even worried that, once again, Polish civilian authority will find themselves subordinate to military authority. Therefore the scenario the Marshal, who always criticised 'the governing by Second Divisions', so tried to avoid would became reality.[326]

Despite himself holding a dual office as the Head of the Army and the Minister of War, Pilsudski had always explicitly claimed that he wanted the Armed Forces to be freed from any external (political) pressure. In order to achieve this independence, he included a special clause safeguarding the separation of the military and civilian spheres in the 1935 Constitution. Thus, when Moscicki and Skladkowski decided to elevate Rydz-Smigly to the position of a 'second person in the state' (First Citizen) in November 1936, they openly circumvented it. This raised eyebrows among the few still politically active 'Colonels', as well as some of the more conservative Sanacja figures.[327] Rydz-Smigly's subsequent promotion to Marshaldom was received even more critically.[328] Indeed, many saw it as an indication of Rydz-Smigly's appetite for dictatorship, or to succeed Moscicki as President.[329]

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[326] The Polish Intelligence Service was known as Oddzial II (the Second Division). PISM, Michal Lubienski, Chef de Cabinet to Minister Jozef Beck in Warsaw, to Edward Raczysnki, Polish Ambassador in London, 25 Nov. 1935, *Kolekcja Edwarda Raczynskiego*, 23/H/348; Waclaw Jedrzejewicz's 1928 conversation with Pilsudski invoked a similar sentiment. Having just returned from Tokyo, the young officer was demobilised and 'moved' to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to 'make politics, but not in uniform because in Poland only [Pilsudski] can make politics in a uniform.' Waclaw Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia* [*Memories*], (Wroclaw, 1993), 270.

[327] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 223.

[328] In her diary, the poet Maria Dabrowska recalls that amid surprise at Rydz-Smigly's nomination the public bitingly joked that 'The first Marshal condemned Poland for greatness, but the second Marshal had pardoned her.' Maria Dabrowska, *Dzienniki* [*Diaries*],Vol. 2, (Warszawa, 1988), 103.

[329] Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia*, 224.

Unfortunately, the security conscious Jozef Beck did not keep a diary, and his wife's memoirs make no mention of the Minister's reaction to Rydz-Smigly's political advancement. The minister was absent from Warsaw in July 1936, when Moscicki's decree was publicised and later, in November, only issued a lapidary notice to the Polish diplomatic outposts informing them of Rydz-Smigly's promotion and requesting they keep the official government line when commenting on it.[330] Nevertheless, if the reaction of his friends is anything to go by, it is not hard to see how Rydz-Smigly's instant transformation from Major-General to Marshal in one day must have contributed to the growing rift between Rydz-Smigly and a Beck who saw himself as the keeper of Pilsudski's flame.

Both brothers Jedrzejewicz, as well as Slawek, criticised this elevation as tactless and illustrative of negative changes in Rydz-Smigly's character. Indeed, it was around this time that Rydz-Smigly apparently stared alluding to his own strategic genius.[331] A process that would result in, to quote Cat-Mackiewicz's slightly exaggerated view, the creation of 'a false idol so incapable that he had to be pushed around in a cart-wheel.'[332] In the end Janusz Jedrzejewicz refused to attend Rydz-Smigly's promotion ceremony and Slawek was tempted not to do so either.

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[330] Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 324.

[331] Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 224.

[332] Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz, *Historia Polski od 11 listopada 1918 do 17 wrzesnia 1939 roku* [*Polish history from 11 November 1918 to 17 September 1939*], (Warszawa, 1989), 126. It is important to consider Cat's strong personal dislike of Rydz-Smigly which might be related to the time both men spent in Vilnius as well as the events of 1938-1939 when Mackiewicz was arrested and interned in Bereza Kartuska concentration camp. The official reason quoted by Rydz-Smigly's protégée, PM Skladkowski was Cat's supposed spreading of defeatism through whistle-blowing editorials drawing attention in armament disparity between Poland in Germany in the *Slowo Wilenskie* newspaper. Skladkowski, *Nie ostatnie*, 379.

Indeed, Rydz-Smigly's 'usurping' of Pilsudski's title was likely at the heart of the tense atmosphere that existed between Beck and Rydz-Smigly in 1937 and which eventually prompted the Minister to visit the General Inspectorate with a 'peace offering'. In the sceptical Beck's own words: '[both men] shook hands and agreed to better coordinate the work of their respective institutions.'[333] Nevertheless, Beck's refusal to join the new Oboz Zjednoczenia Narodowego party (OZN) that Rydz-Smigly created in place of Slawek's dissolved BBWR (cross-party pro-government bloc) spoke rather more loudly.

The elite's mood following Rydz-Smigly's promotion to General Inspector could be described as 'out with the old, in with the new' and some of the most prominent post-May politicians would find themselves facing a very different and quite rude individual instead of the warm and polite Rydz-Smigly they were used to.[334] Beck for one, seems to have been rather put out by the brutality with which Rydz-Smigly shut former Premier Slawek out of politics. Indeed, he was the only key political figure who still had close contact with Slawek and those associated with him. In his memoir, Waclaw Jedrzejewicz emphasises that the Becks were the only ones who still kept the Jedrzejewiczes on their invitation list and thus provided a link with the political world.[335] Moreover, Beck still sought Slawek's council, but he took care to be secretive about those meetings. Count Szembek recalls that on occasion when one November 1935 evening, he went to Beck's apartment to brief the minister about the

[333] Pawel Starzenski, *Trzy Lata z Beckiem* [*Three Years with Beck*], (Londyn, 1972), 90.
[334] Formed Prime Minister, Janusz Jedrzejewicz, describes how he was snubbed by the general when he phoned to congratulate him on his promotion to the General Inspector. Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie*, 208-209.
[335] Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia*, 268.

Economics Committee meeting he had just attended. Upon arrival, he was told by the servant that the minister had been dining with Slawek and that they are still talking. Still, Beck himself tried to conceal Slawek's presence, insisting on seeing his Deputy in the hallway, and failing to mention the former Prime minister's name.[336]

Lacking a protector and uncertain about Pilsudski's successor, Beck's weakening position opposite Moscicki and Rydz-Smigly quickly became apparent. Owing to the shake-up that followed Pilsudski's death, Moscicki was able to decide on the new government on his own, and although Beck's (and Rydz-Smigly's) opposition to Kwiatkowski becoming Finance Minister was noted, the minister failed in his attempt to bloc Kwiatkowski's nomination.[337] Just twelve months later, the President and newly dominant General Inspector of the Armed Forces would successfully restrict Beck's ability to participate in the formation of Poland's internal and financial policies. When in September 1936 Beck found himself in Geneva during the devaluation of the Swiss and French francs, and tentatively requested that the planned meeting on currency and financial matters be postponed until his return, Skladkowski the current Premier and Rydz-Smigly's protégé, refused.[338]

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[336] Entry from 6 Nov 1935. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 397.

[337] In a report to Eden, sir Howard Kennard recounts his conversation with Senator Prince Radziwill who stated that both Rydz-Smigly and Beck were against Kwiatkowski's nomination and argued for making Adam Koc the Finance Minister. Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 10 Feb. 1936, TNA, C 9094955, FO 417/36. Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Twilight of the French Eastern Alliances, 1926 – 1936. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarisation of the Rhineland*, (Princeton, 1962), 414.

[338] Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 300.

As we have mentioned before, Pilsudski's death was greeted in Paris with hope of Beck's speedy departure.[339] Many in the Quai d'Orsay, as well as the French Ambassador to Warsaw, Leon Noel, despised Beck, who had frequently frustrated their plans in Eastern Europe.[340] One of the many ways in which this manifested itself was by criticizing the Minister in the French press and attacking him in Geneva.[341] The feeling was, of course, mutual. Nowhere did it manifest itself more than in the difference in tone and character between Beck's communications with the British and those with the French. The diplomatic notes delivered to the Foreign Office and Quai d'Orsay on 21 September 1938 are perfect examples. Writing to London, Beck was firm but polite in his insistence that Polish territorial demands be treated equally with those of other states. In his communiqué to Paris, he dropped the frills and expressed his lack of confidence in France's ability to deal with the crisis.[342] However, even before that bristling exchange of notes, Noel orchestrated an attempt to by-pass Beck. Following Minister Pierre Laval's May 1935 visit to Poland, Beck tried to organise a return visit to Paris in early 1936 but the French discouraged it.[343] Instead, taking advantage of the Minister's absence on League business in Geneva, Quai d'Orsay decided, in August 1936, to send another high-ranking official, General Maurice Gamelin, to Warsaw.[344] It was either during this

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[339] Martin Alexander, *The Republic in danger: General Maurice Gamelin and the politics of French defence, 1933-1940*, 283; also Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 373.

[340] Alexander, *The Republic*, 285-286; also Henryk Bulhak, *Polska-Francja: Z dziejow sojuszu 1933-1939* [*Poland and France: The history of an alliance 1933-1939]*, (Warszawa, 2000), 117.

[341] Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 333.

[342] Cat-Mackiewicz, *Polityka*, 162.

[343] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 3 Feb 1936. TNA, C70931755, FO417.

[344] Yvon Delbos was keen to ensure that Gamelin and Rydz-Smigly forge an understanding and instructed Ambassador Noel to facilitate this. Alexander, *The Republic*, 285. Moreover, it is possible that newly minted French Foreign Minister was inspired to organise the visit by Beck's predecessor, August Zaleski. According to himself, Zaleski met with Delbos, Gamelin and Paul-Boncour while visiting Paris in the spring of 1935 and in the course of the conversation suggested

visit or immediately after that general Rydz-Smigly received a preliminary invitation to Paris. And although there exists some confusion about where the French invitation originated from – whether it came from Noel, who was trying to exploit the rivalry between Beck and Rydz-Smigly or, as argued by Lukaszewicz the Polish Ambassador and minister Szembek, directly from Paris – what is clear was that this was the first time when Rydz-Smigly emerged as a truly alternative foreign policy decision-maker. Not only did he know about the invitation (through the General Staff) before the Foreign Ministry did, he also accepted it before discussing the details with either Beck or Szembek.[345]

As we have seen before, Rydz-Smigly's propulsion into the centre of Polish political stage gave rise to much speculation that by the sheer virtue of being a supporter of a closer Franco-Polish alliance, he would be able to 'correct' Beck's pro-Berlin line. However, while his sentiments were shared by the majority of the public that did not approve of Beck's apparent policy of intimacy with Hitler; this might have not been true of the Armed Forces. Indeed, in his annual report on the state of the Polish Army in 1934, ambassador Kennard stressed the anti-Gallic bias among the officer corps.[346] What is more, the absence of French acknowledgement of the

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that the tightening of the Franco-Polish alliance should be pursued through military channels. Interestingly, he claims to have recommend awarding Rydz-Smigly a military honour as a pretext to opening talks (the Marshal received Legion d'Honeur when revisiting Gamelin in September 1936). August Zaleski, Foreign Minister in Exile in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 24 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/cz/3/III. Maria Pasztor contradicts Zaleski's assertions. In her detailed examination the circumstances of Gamelin's visit, she suggests that it was expected by Warsaw. Maria Pasztor, 'Wokol wizyty Gamelina w Warszawie: 12-17 VIII 1936' ['The circumstances of Gamelin's visit to Warsaw: 12-17 VIII 1936'], *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, CV (4), (1998), 74.

345 Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 40.

346 Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to John Simon, Foreign Secretary in London, *Annual Report on the Polish Army*, 1 Jan 1934, TNA, C8228755, FO 417/35.

Polish readiness to carry out her allied obligations following the German re-militarisation of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936, did nothing to endear Paris to the Polish army. Even Rydz-Smigly was reportedly very put off.[347]

Nevertheless, despite Polish political and military elites' usual preoccupation with real or imaginary offence and Rydz-Smigly's record of holding grudges (see page 133), the French slight did not cause Rydz-Smigly to change his mind.[348] He literally could not afford to. As one of the key decision makers, Rydz-Smigly was very much aware of the dire financial situation Poland found herself in. As far back as November 1935, having just undergone complex negotiations with the Hague, the Polish Military Command had to withdraw the majority of their submarine order due to financial problems.[349] A further example of the dire financial situation of the Polish Army was the decision taken in July 1936 to cut-back on the air-force building plan due to its cost: 1,153,000,000 zlotys.[350]

Bearing this in mind, one can argue that Rydz-Smigly came to view a Franco-Polish rapprochement as the only way to strengthen Poland's diplomatic position vis-a-vis Germany, which he mistrusted, while also improving her own defence, as he believed the cooperation would eventually yield military credits from Paris. Indeed, when Count Szembek expressed to Rydz-Smigly scepticism about the likelihood of obtaining credits, the general replied that he was being constantly asked by French

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[347] Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi*, 296.

[348] Approximately 400 duels took place every year. Slawomir Koper, *Zycie elit Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*The private life of the elites of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2009), 46.

[349] Although, the downsizing of the order to just two was also motivated by the intention to woo the French who were 'promised' future Polish shipping as well as, artillery orders. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 417.

[350] As a result, the number of fighter planes and liners was cut by two-thirds. General Tadeusz Malinowski, Deputy Chief of General Staff, to general Ludomil Rayski, Chief of the Aeronautics Department, minutes of a meeting, 7 Jul 1936. Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe [thereafter abbreviated to CAW], SeKOR I.303.13.108.

agents to make such an agreement.[351] During the same conversation, Rydz-Smigly asserted that while he did not want to radically change the Polish foreign policy and saw the policy of rapprochement with Germany as currently necessary, he was wary of Berlin and believed that the Nazis might attack Poland in the next two to three years if they reached combat readiness. When confronted with one of Beck's main arguments for the Polish-German détente, namely that Hitler was not a Prussian and was, therefore, more interested in southward rather than eastward expansion; Rydz-Smigly remained unconvinced. He cited the heavy fortifications in East Prussia and the possibility that the unfortified Silesia was meant to act as a 'gate' for future German attack, in his support.[352]

On 30 August 1936, Rydz-Smigly duly arrived on the Seine. There, focused on his goal of obtaining credits, Rydz-Smigly remained unmoved by the allusions to a possible Polish-Soviet-Czech cooperation made to him by general Gamelin.[353] He declined to get involved in political negotiations and advised his counterpart to present such initiatives to the Polish government through proper diplomatic channels.[354]

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[351] Rydz-Smigly's conversation with Szembek on 30 Jun 1936. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 236; Szembek was not the only person sceptical about the feasibility of obtaining a French loan. Shortly before, Rydz-Smigly's visit to Paris, Herman Libermann – a distinguished lawyer and former member of Parliament – wrote a boastful letter to the exiled peasants' leader Witos in which he claimed that Beck is sending Rydz-Smigly to France for a loan but, he (Liberman) made sure that he would never get it. Witos, *Moja Tulaczka*, 339.

[352] Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 236.

[353] The Frenchman was even supposed to bring Rydz-Smigly an indicative note from Benes in an attempt to broker a Polish-Czech détente. Waclaw Jedrzejewicz and Henryk Bulhak, *Dyplomata w Paryzu 1936-1939: Wspomnienia i dokumenty Juliusza Lukasiewicza ambasadora Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej* [*Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939: Memoir and papers of Juliusz Lukasiewicz Ambassador of the Polish Republic*], (London, 1989), 33.

[354] Jedrzejewicz and Bulhak, *Dyplomata w Paryzu*, 33.

Following its feeble attempt to broker a Polish-Czechoslovak détente, the Quai, now aware of Rydz-Smigly's attitude to foreign interference in internal Polish affairs, did not try to openly undermine Beck again.[355] Instead, it agreed to give Warsaw an armaments loan, knowing that the mere fact that Rydz-Smigly's first foray into diplomacy would be seen as a great success would deliver a blow to the Foreign Minister's internal position. Paris had also correctly guessed that the general's burnished reputation would diminish the Minister's standing in Rydz-Smigly's eyes and encourage the newly powerful and ambitious general to become more involved in Poland's foreign relations.

Thus, on 6 September 1936, Gamelin and Rydz-Smigly concluded the Treaty of Rambouillet that apart from renewing the Franco-Polish alliances of 1921 and 1925 also granted Poland an armaments loan of 2 billion francs. Rydz-Smigly returned to Warsaw basking in the glory of his easy diplomatic success and his choice to come back through Venice and Vienna, unlike Beck who usually returned from Western Europe via Berlin, indicated that he was usurping at least some power over Polish foreign relations. Rydz-Smigly was trying to strengthen the Franco-Polish alliance and purposefully gave Berlin the cold shoulder. All that was left to the Foreign Minister was to desperately try to reassure Germany that Poland was not going to drastically change her foreign-policy line.[356] And while Beck might not have explicitly expressed his displeasure at Rydz-Smigly's arbitrary act, his attitude to the visit was clearly disapproving. He repeatedly emphasised the military, as opposed to

[355] In his communication with Quai d'Orsay prior to Rydz-Smigly's visit, Ambassador Noel (possibly acting on an inspiration from general Wladyslaw Sikorski) suggested that France should make any potential loans to Poland, conditional on a cabinet reshuffle and the removal of Beck. See Piotr Wandycz and Anna Cienciala, 'Polonia Restituta – czyli Noel Redivivus' ['Poland reborn – or Noel revived'], *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 72, (1985), 150.

[356] Juliusz Lukasiewicz, *Diplomat in Paris, 1936-1939: Papers and Memoirs of Juliusz Lukasiewicz, Ambassador of Poland,* (New York, 1970), 13.

political, character of the visit and presented his own visit to London as of much greater importance.[357] Moreover, the Minister also clearly resented Rydz-Smigly's attempts to capitalise on his Parisian success and even complained to Premier Skladkowski that the public should fête Rydz-Smigly's return from military games not Paris.[358] This sentiment was also obvious to ambassador Kennard who reported:

> One wonders what M. Beck's real feelings on the subject may be. In conversation with me he has expressed a rather reserved enthusiasm for the success which has attended these negotiations and he was the first to welcome the general on his return from Paris. There are rumours that one of the results of the visit will be an early reconstruction of the Government involving a change at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Such talk, however, has been heard so often in the past that one is disinclined to place much credence in it...[359]

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A Rydzelite - quarter-totalitarianism[360]

One of Beck's predecessors in the Foreign Ministry, Kajetan Morawski, described the situation in Poland after Pilsudski's death as 'a dictatorship of multiple dictators' with Beck being the sole architect and decision-maker responsible for Polish foreign policy while Rydz-Smigly was the military and national defence chief.[361] Yet the

[357] Beck's annual expose to the Senate's Foreign Affair Committee on 18 December 1936. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 563.
[358] Szembek's conversation with Beck on 21 Dec 1936. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 353.
[359] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 14 Sept. 1936, TNA, C6510440055, FO 417/36.
[360] Cat-Mackiewicz, *Polityka*, 118.
[361] After serving in the Witos Cabinet, Morawski was removed from the diplomatic service following

evidence from the archives and the diaries reviewed in this chapter shows that that division was not quite as clear cut. The success of Rydz-Smigly's self-promotion efforts – Marshaldom, forming his own political party and eagerness to participate in political rallies[362] - is reflected in the dozens of letters Rydz-Smigly received from members of the public and institutions. He certainly managed to carve himself out a special position within the society and, revered by the public as Pilsudski's successor, they wrote to him about matters that fell outside his remit: such as reform of the state and political system.[363] Interestingly, a fair proportion of the correspondence indirectly appealed to Rydz-Smigly's vanity and complained about the inadequacy of the other leaders, most notably president Moscicki and Prime Minister Skladkowski. Even though Cat-Mackiewicz one of the general's contemporaries described Rydz-Smigly in less favourable terms, as 'having no idea about political or diplomatic matters. […] [H]e was as naive about them as a newborn baby or a middle sized calf. He didn't like or trust Germany, he didn't like or trust Beck, he didn't even want to consider talking to the Soviets..."[364] That the general appeared to be quite open about his foreign policy beliefs demonstrates Rydz-Smigly's encroachment into up to then Beck's sole domain.

We saw that Rydz-Smigly's first foray into diplomacy and the successful conclusion of the Treaty of Rambouillet with France was the culmination of a

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the May 1926 and had spend the next decade on the peripheries of the political life. He returned to Warsaw in 1936 when he was made the Deputy-Secretary of the Treasury. Morawski quoted in Terlecki, *Pulkownik Beck,* 115.

362 Although sometimes with disastrous consequences like when he was booed and chased out by the crowd at a peasant gathering at Nowosielce on 9 July 1936. Arthur Francis Aveling, Counsellor at the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 20 Jul. 1936, TNA, C 55484955, FO 417/36.

363 Mr Malinowski to Edward Rydz-Smigly, General Inspector of the Armed Forces, 14 Mar 1936. CAW, SeKOR I.303.13.114; or S. Andrzejowski to Edward Rydz-Smigly, General Inspector of the Armed Forces, Apr 1936. CAW, SeKOR I.302.2.1.

364 Cat-Mackiewicz, *Polityka*, 117.

gradual process. Rydz-Smigly began his insinuation into foreign policy by actively participating in organising Polish official delegations in his capacity as Head of the Army. First, he attempted to veto the suggestion to send General Sosnkowski to the funeral of King George V. At the time he was persuaded to do otherwise by Beck who had already agreed the matter with ambassador Raczynski and Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary. Barely a year later, Rydz-Smigly appeared a lot more 'decisive' in his opposition to sending General Regulski to the funeral of Hungarian Prime Minister Goemboes. In this case too, the Hungarian authorities had already been notified about Regulski's arrival, but during a squabble between the Ministry of War and the General Staff, Rydz-Smigly intervened on behalf of the Staff, Regulski was dropped from the delegation and the Foreign Ministry was left to pick up the pieces.[365] By the autumn of 1936, Rydz-Smigly 's position had become so strong that he started intervening in Foreign Ministry's staffing decisions and had successfully blocked Beck's decision to post Waclaw Jedrzejewicz to Tokyo.[366] A former Education Minister, Jedrzejewicz had experience in working in both the Foreign Office and Intelligence Service and was a Japanese-speaker, so Rydz-Smigly's motives for striking down his candidature are not clear while Beck was obviously quite embarrassed and annoyed about the situation.[367] So much so, that he never again mentioned his offer to Jedrzejewicz, who only found out about Rydz-Smigly's opposition from the Ambassador to Paris, Lukasiewicz. Given that soon after those events, Rydz-Smigly forced Jedrzejewicz to resign from his post at the Polish

[365] The conflict between the Ministry of War and the General Staff erupted around the Staff's opposition to the Ministry exercising foreign policy functions even though the General Staff did not have not actually been entrusted any political functions. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 2, 304.

[366] Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia*, 268.

[367] Soon after this Rydz-Smigly forced Jedrzejewicz to resign from his post with the Polish Telephone Agency. Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia*, 269.

Telephones Agency, one could infer that the General was either avenging some past feud, or determined to eliminate old Pilsudskites from public affairs. Jedrzejewicz himself seems to believe that Rydz-Smigly was under the influence of a group of disgruntled officers who felt that they were excluded during the last years of Pilsudski's life.[368] Soon, the new Marshal would became the person who would reprimand Ambassador Wieniawa for not paying him a visit during his stay in Warsaw and irritably state that 'nothing in this country could happen without my knowledge.'[369]

As for Beck himself, the Minister had, despite persistent rumours to the contrary, managed to survive in his post not just through the brief period of Koscialkowski government but up until the very end. Some have even seen Beck's invitation to join the cabinet of Koscialkowski's successor Skladkowski as indicative of the strengthening of the Foreign Minister's domestic position.[370] However, this was actually symptomatic of precisely the opposite. Despite his apparent dislike of Beck and distrust of Germany, Rydz-Smigly had no intention of severing all contacts with Berlin.[371] He alluded to this a number of times and had even explained to general Gamelin that Beck could not be removed from office due to his good contacts with Hitler's entourage. Moreover, the policy of rapprochement between Warsaw and

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[368] Jedrzejewicz, *Wspomnienia*, 269.

[369] Archiwum Akt Nowych (thereafter abbreviated to AAN), Edward Rydz-Smigly, General Inspector for the Armed Forces in Warsaw, to Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Polish Ambassador in Rome, 9 May 1939, *Ambasada Rzym*, Sygn. 24.

[370] Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 28 Dec. 1936, TNA, C252555, FO 371/20760.

[371] The Marshal's desktop diaries suggest that sometimes he completely ignored Beck and instead of listening to what the Minister was saying preferred to sketch him. See for example the doodle on 22 Nov. 1936 made when Minister Beck and Ambassador Lukasiewicz were received by the Marshal at 11 am. JPIoA, *Ed*ward Rydz-Smigly's Desk Calendar, 1936, *Kolekcja Edwarda Smiglego-Rydza*, Zes. 98/8.

Berlin was buying Poland time, presumably, to prepare for the inevitable future confrontation with Germany.[372]

Rydz-Smigly therefore found himself somewhat stuck with Beck in the Foreign Ministry. Although he became increasingly involved in all other Polish diplomatic matters he initially shied away from the Polish-German relations. In conversations with his contemporaries he appeared, and indeed sometimes admitted, to not knowing a great deal about the Polish-German relationship and was rather reluctant to establish contacts with German political figures. Indeed, the German Ambassador von Moltke had even complained, in Autumn 1936, that Rydz-Smigly seemed to be avoiding him. [373]

This chapter focused on the growing conflict between Marshal Rydz-Smigly and Minister Beck. Rydz-Smigly 's persistent efforts to exert his authority over Beck eventually allowed him to have a decisive say in all but one foreign policy matter. The day-to-day conduct of Polish-German diplomatic relations remained solely Beck's domain and one whose independence he would guard fiercely. The following chapters will show how this small personal conflict among a tightly knit elite had a disproportionally large impact on political and military decision-making.

[372] Materials related to Rydz-Smigly's 1936 visit to France. Tytus Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki* Vol. 2, 493.
[373] Minister Szembek's conversation with Marshal Rydz-Smigly on 5 Oct. 1936 and with Ambassador von Moltke on 22 Oct. 1936. Komarnicki (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki* Vol. 2, 298 and 316.

Chapter Four: *1937 – too damn quiet?*

Approaching Polish history from a pan-European perspective, one might find oneself drawing a blank in 1937. Unlike its predecessor, 1937 saw no public declarations of Warsaw's support for a France humiliated by the remilitarisation of the Rhineland. Neither did it witness the stirring ultimatum directed at Lithuania or invited popular outrage at the unceremonious partitioning of Czechoslovakia as it did in 1938. Indeed, Polish squabbles with the Senate of the Free City of Danzig, an exchange with Berlin of declarations on minority rights and attempts to strengthen peripheral Balkan alliances would have hardly attracted much attention in a year when a proxy war on the Iberian Peninsula was fought between Europe's fascist and communist powers and a Sino-Japanese conflict raged in the Far East. Unlike the British coronation, the French general strike or the Irish constitution, nothing happened in Poland that would even briefly propel the country to the world's front-pages.

And yet, it would be a mistake to think of 1937 as the year that nothing politically significant happened. Far from abating, the internal conflict, the emergence of which I charted in the previous chapter, intensified, prompting the British Ambassador to bemoan the obscurity and complexity of the Polish contemporary political scene.[374] The Foreign Office's recipients of his dispatches were even more blunt. One of them, Third Secretary, Patrick Hancock, even remarked that the Sanacja regime was 'disintegrating' and thought Rydz-Smigly 'manifestly incapable of carrying on

[374] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 2 Nov. 1937, TNA, C76292455, FO 371/20760.

Pilsudski's work.'[375] The perceived stillbirth of Rydz-Smigly's political initiative: the Camp of National Unity (OZN), being the reason for such a damning assessment.

The OZN's emergence might have been the most obvious sign of the increasing fragmentation of the Polish political scene, but it was far from unique. Corridors, drawing rooms and cafés of power buzzed as conflicts were stoked, new factions formed and old alliances splintered. The conflict central to my thesis, between the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jozef Beck and the newly minted Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, was no exception and of critical importance.

In the first part of this chapter I will follow its progress through the petty crises of Poland's 1937 domestic politics. This will allow me to show, in the later part of this chapter, that the seemingly quiet and nondescript year of 1937 determined Poland's behaviour during the pivotal moments of 1938.

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Strong, ready and collected[376]

In a retrospective piece for *Gazeta Polska w*ritten in the last days of 1936, Boguslaw Miedzinski remarked that, structurally, the Sanacja regime had completely decomposed.[377] One of the first signs of this decomposition was, as we saw in the last chapter, the dissolution of Sanacja's parliamentary grouping – the Non-Party

[375] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 2 Nov. 1937, TNA, C76292455, FO 371/20760.

[376] One of the slogans used by official Polish propaganda (posters, leaflets, etc) in the run up to the Second World War. Also used in the title of Jacek Majchrowski's book about OZN's ideology. See, Jacek Majchrowski, *Silni, zwarci i gotowi. Mysl polityczna Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego* [*Strong, ready and collected. The political thought of the Camp of National Unity*], (Warszawa, 1985).

[377] Quoted after Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne lata Trzydzieste* [*The beautiful Thirties*], (Warszawa, 2008), 269.

Bloc of Cooperation with the Government (BBWR) on 30 October 1935. Six months after it achieved its goal of ushering through a new constitution, its front man, Walery Slawek, decided that the organisation's existence could no longer be justified. Sidelined from the new government, Slawek instead focused on drafting the programme of a new Sanacja organisation. This broader 'BBWR 2' was to be called Powszechna Organizacja Spoleczna,[378] focus on upholding the new constitution and thus be fit for Poland post-Pilsudski.

As we already know, Rydz-Smigly thwarted Slawek's ambitious plan with a few lines of his scraggly writing. This did not of course mean that Rydz-Smigly disagreed with the principle that Pilsudski's death required some political readjustments from the regime; indeed, he had already floated the idea of uniting the Polish society under the banner of national defence during the Annual Congress of the Legionaries' Associations in May 1936, and in July of the same year, he asked Colonel Adam Koc to help him set up a new political group, the OZN.[379] The chief difference in programme between Slawek's and Rydz-Smigly's organisations was that the latter did not make explicit references to the constitution's authority. Instead, the Camp of National Unity fancied itself a direct successor of the BBWR's Jozef Pilsudski cult. But, its gushing assessment of the First Marshal's 'great qualities and intuitive capacity for taking wise decisions in state affairs,'[380] hid an important caveat, namely that now that Pilsudski was dead his posthumous authority would

[378] The name could be translated as an Organisation for the Whole of the Society.

[379] National defense and 'driving the will of the people' were the central themes of Rydz-Smigly's rapturously received speech. 'Przemowienie Naczelnego Wodza' ['Commander's in Chief Speech'], *Gazeta Lwowska*, 26 May 1936, 1.

[380] A report from his conversation wit Adam Koc, British Ambassador Kennard, is particularly useful in shedding some light on the rationale and strategy behind the creation of the OZN. Howard Kennard's report from his conversation with Adam Koc. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Dec. 1936, TNA, C 242455, FO 371/20759.

legitimise the government 'promptly' taking 'whatever action was considered necessary in the State's interest.'[381] In other words, the OZN wanted Poland to become an altogether more authoritarian state.

And, despite the OZN's apparent abhorrence of both Communism and Fascism and Koc's insistence that Warsaw was purely trying to match the speedy decision-making of totalitarian Berlin and Moscow, as time went on one could not help but distrust its assurances that it did not aim to bring the Polish system closer to those of its Eastern and Western neighbours.[382] Preaching national unity and cross-party cooperation, the OZN was nonetheless reluctant to admit Jewish members and unwilling to lift the controversial electoral laws that discriminated against young voters.[383] Another way in which the Camp wanted to differentiate itself from the dominant movements in Italy, Germany and the USSR was its denunciation of the 'Furher' principle. The OZN's Head and creator, Marshal Rydz-Smigly was to only serve as a 'moral leader [of the movement], an impartial [sic!] arbiter.'[384]

Although intended to be very quick, in the end the process of OZN's development took nearly a year. Koc's right-wing leanings made his initial programme declaration

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[381] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Dec. 1936, TNA, C242455, FO 371/20759.

[382] Ibid.

[383] The April 1935 Constitution excluded younger people from participating in politics. Voting age was increased to 24 from 18 years and a minimum age limit of 30 was introduced for parliamentary candidates. Full text of the Constitution can be found in *Dziennik Ustaw*, issue no. 30 (1935), position 227, 497-508. The regulation was denounced by all parties of the Polish opposition who boycotted the parliamentary debate on the new law. Their absence was exploited by the Speaker of the Sejm, Stanislaw Car, who called a surprise vote to adopt the new constitution. Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate 1918-1939*, (New York, 1982), 336-337.

[384] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Dec. 1936, TNA, C242455, FO 371/20759.

so unpalatable that it had to be completely rewritten. By the time the Colonel completed his second draft Rydz-Smigly fell ill. So it was already 1937 when, two surgical operations and a convalescence period later, he finally approved the final programme proposal.[385] The failure of the project could be directly linked to this delay. It allowed the peasants' Polish People's Party (PSL) to get one step ahead and steal the OZN's thunder by issuing a call for a version of national unity of their own.[386] Worse, it permitted many 'old Pilsudskites' to close ranks and resist the movement. The controversy surrounding the annual Legionaries' Congress held on 8 August 1937 in Krakow illustrates this growing dissent.[387]

Although held under the auspices of the new Marshal, Edward Rydz-Smigly, and officially hosted by Colonel Koc, the Congress always was, as we already know from a previous chapter, something more than a reunion of old comrades in arms.[388] It was the Sanacja equivalent of a party conference. An event where policies could be floated, stands could be taken, new initiatives launched.[389] For the event to be shunned by regime grandees was unheard of and yet that was precisely what, the former Prime Minister Walery Slawek, the serving Speaker of the Senate Aleksander

[385] Edward Rydz-Smigly suffered first from angina and then from appendicitis. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Dec. 1936, TNA, C242455, FO 371/20759.

[386] OZN's unique cross-partisanship was one of its key 'selling' points so PSL's public declaration dealt a serious blow to the initiative. Howard Kennard, Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 26 Jan. 1937, TNA, C7612455, FO 371/20759.

[387] The General Congress of Legionary Associations.

[388] Adam Koc officially became the Commandant of the new Legionaries' Association on 25 May 1936. The new Association emerged from an amalgamation of the Legionaries Association (headed until May 25 by Walery Slawek) and the Regimental Circles (Kola Pulkowe) headed by Edward Rydz-Smigly. *Gazeta Lwowska* after PAT (Polish Telegraphic Agency), (129), 25 May 1937, 1.

[389] For example, Edward Rydz-Smigly first floated his plans for the OZN during the 1936 Delegates' Congress held in Warsaw

Prystor and one of the most senior of Polish generals Kazimierz Sosnkowski, did in August 1937.[390]

Considering the sensational rumours circulating among Warsaw's high society prior to the event, a no-show looked like a rather tame protest. People had reportedly been expecting arrests and a demonstration against Colonel Koc.[391] A few weeks before the Congress, on 19 July 1937, Pilsudski's former chief of security, major Kazimierz Kaciukiewicz telephoned the Chief of Police Zamorski with 'worrying intelligence' and the Congress organisers even cancelled a remembrance march to the newly completed Pilsudski Mound.[392] But, while unobtrusive, Slawek's and Pilsudstkite 'old guard's' absence was no less damning to Rydz-Smigly than a mass rally would have been – a sign that the regime was well and truly split.

Despite his pro-Slawek sympathies, Beck's position in the government made it difficult for him to openly criticise the Camp of National Unity. Accidentally, although rather conveniently, the Minister was absent from Warsaw when the OZN was finally launched. Just as Rydz-Smigly was recovering from his illness, Beck succumbed to the flu, which spurred a relapse of his lung condition. To restore his ailing health he spent the next two months in the South of France where he missed

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[390] Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal in London, 11 Aug. 1937, TNA, C58872455, FO 371/20759.
Considering Sosnkowski's long-standing support for the idea of reconciliation with the opposition, his snub of the OZN was particularly damning.

[391] Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal in London, 25 Aug.1937, TNA, C 61152455, FO 371/20759.

[392] Kordian Zamorski, *Dzienniki (1930 – 1938)* [*Diary (1930-1938)*], (Warszawa, 2011), 402; Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Leader of the House of Lords and Lord Privy Seal in London, 25 Aug. 1937, TNA, C 61152455, FO 371/20759.

the launch of Rydz-Smigly's initiative and after delaying his decision to join he eventually chose not to become a member. This, according to people close to Beck, added to the animosity between the Minister and Rydz-Smigly and made the former's work more difficult.[393]

In the previous chapter we already mentioned that Beck's autonomy was under increasing pressure. However, as the last of 'the Colonels' with any real power, he alone was in a position to take steps to slow down the erosion of Pilsudskite ideology. One of such steps was to keep Rydz-Smigly away from the Polish-German relations, a task which became more strenuous with every passing month. The bilateral minority and Danzig negotiations, which will be covered later in this chapter, show how the pressure mounted on Beck as Berlin tried to bypass the Foreign Affairs Ministry and communicate directly with the Marshal. Rydz-Smigly, meanwhile, had become confident enough to publicise his own foreign policy doctrine.

One particular example of this occurred in April 1937, shortly after Easter. *Kurjer Poranny*, one of the two main pro-regime dailies, which had by then became closely associated with Colonel Koc and the OZN, published a hardline article in which stated that Poland would never agree to the changes to the Danzig's constitution proposed by the local Nazi party. The Foreign Affairs Ministry, which wanted a

[393] Tadeusz Schaetzel, former colonel and Deputy Speaker of the Sejm in London, to Wladyslaw Pobog-Malinowski, historian in Geneva, undated. The letter concerned possible editing of or excluding from print parts of Beck's manuscript describing the internal situation in Poland. Jozef Pilsudski Institute of America (thereafter JPIoA), *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

peaceful resolution of the matter was understandably displeased with this unprecedented and disruptive interference.[394]

Such a blatant appeal to the Poles' nationalist sentiments was symptomatic of the OZN's determination to collaborate with (some) of the National Democrats, a move that would have been opposed by Beck on two levels.

Beck as 'Minister' disliked it on the grounds that it made his work of maintaining good Polish-German relations harder. The aforementioned article in the *Kurjer* earned a strong-worded response in the Free City's *Danziger Verposten*. Indeed, as spats multiplied and each side responded in a 'tit-for-tat' [395] to the other's provocations, minor issues grew out of proportions and Beck's pro-German stance became harder to justify at home.

Beck as 'Colonel' was naturally aggrieved by the marginalisation of his friends and long-term colleagues by Rydz-Smigly, but, more importantly, he disagreed with the OZN's now obvious diversion from the old Pilsudskite policy doctrine. Indeed, in his memoir, Beck bemoaned both the Camp's nationalism – which he thought manifested through 'grand colonial plans' and growing anti-Semitism, and the 'skewing of the principles of the regime'.[396]

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[394] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 7 Apr. 1937, TNA, C 270855, FO371/20757.

[395] Examples of this ranged from relatively mild: repeated mutual confiscation of the Polish daily *Dziennik Baltycki* in the Free City and Danzig's *Danziger Verposten* in Gdynia to regular clashes between the Polish and German inhabitants of East Prussia. See for example, Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 3 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 7631555, FO371/20758 and Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 16 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 7966555, FO371/20759.

[396] Although the Minister did not specifically mention the OZN, both the time, autumn 1937, and the context suggest that the fledgling organisation was Beck's target. *Wspomnienia* [*Memoir*] (manuscript in Polish), 141. *Kolekcja Jozefa Becka*, Zes. 034/7.

The National Democrats were not Rydz-Smigly's first choice of partner. He originally attempted to win over the largest social group[397] - the peasants.[398] But the fiasco of his already mentioned June 1936 visit to a peasant rally in Nowosielce and the SL's January 1937 competing call for national unity left no doubt that the peasant party was not interested in propping up the regime without receiving significant concessions in return.[399] Chief among them were demands for an amnesty and the right of safe return for its exiled leaders.[400] This was naturally not granted. Indeed, the regime wanted the Opposition leaders to stay away and, as we will see further in this chapter, Prague's sheltering of the exiles further soured the already poor Polish-Czechoslovak relations.

Thus, by mid-1937 the idea of sharing a platform with the SL was discarded. A botched attempt on Adam Koc's life on 20 July 1937 (the bomb exploded prematurely, killing the assassin) saw some members of the OZN trying to lay the blame on the peasants' movement.[401] The episode remains a mystery but even at the

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[397] According to official statistical data from 1938, approximately 70% of the Polish population lived in rural areas and 60% of Poles lived of the land. (Glowny Urzad Statystyczny [National Office of Statistics], *Maly Rocznik Statystyczny* [*Concise Statistical Yearbook*] (Warszawa, 1938), 473). And while support for the Peasants' (People's) Party (SL) was spread unevenly – peasants from the former Prussian partition leaned to the right and Dmowski's National Democrats – it had the support of the majority of the Polish peasant population. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in London, to the Foreign Office in London, *Annual Report on Poland for 1937*, TNA, C83542455, FO 371/20760.

[398] Meaning both support of the rural population and cooperation of their People's Party (SL).

[399] See page 132.

[400] Two years into the first post May Coup Parliament, in August 1930, the Pilsudskite regime dissolved the government and called a snap election for November. Two months before the election, in September 1930, fifteen leaders of the opposition parties, (including PSL's former three-time Premier Wincenty Witos) were accused of treason, arrested and confined in the Brest Litovsk fortress. After a series of political trials during which they were sentenced to between 3 years and 18 months of imprisonment, several of the opposition figures including Witos went into exile. A detailed account of the trial can be found in Garlicki, 'Brzesc', *Piekne lata trzydzieste*, 103-176. See also, Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A history of Poland*, Vol. 2, (Oxford, 2005), 313-314; W. J. Rose, 'Wincenty Witos', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 25 (64), (November 1946), 50-52 and Adam Ordega, 'Herman Liberman', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 23 (62), (January 1945), 148.

[401] According to Pilsudskite historian, Wladyslaw Pobog-Malinowski, following the attack the

time, the peasant connection seemed unlikely to many Sanacja figures and commentators. The Chief of Police, Zamorski, focused on the assassin's 'French connections', possibly implying that he suspected General Wladyslaw Sikorski and other opposition figures associated in his Front Morges alliance, while Prime Minister Skladkowski blamed Sanacja's left-wingers led by Henryk Kawecki and the deputy Interior Minister Jerzy Paciorkowski.[402] On this rare occasion, even the publicist Cat-Mackiewicz agreed with Skladkowski.

Soon, the peasants' General Strike called on 16 August would leave the OZN's leaders seething and make reconciliation neigh impossible.[403] By then, however, Rydz-Smigly and Koc already made the highly controversial decision we alluded to earlier and invited a radical, and previously de-legalised, faction of the National Democratic movement to join their Camp.

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unlucky bomb was traced back to the local locksmith from the assassin's village. Questioned, the locksmith allegedly incriminated peasant leaders Stanislaw Mikolajczyk and Stanislaw Kot. After Wladyslaw Pobog-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia Polityczna Polski* [*The Modern Political History of Poland*], vol. 2, (London, 1956), 527; Rydz-Smigly's biographer Ryszard Mirowicz also suspected that the attack was an anti-opposition provocation organised by people close to the marshal. Ryszard Mirowicz, *Edward Rydz-Smigly. Dzialalnosc wojskowa i polityczna* [*Edward Rydz-Smigly and his political and military activity*], (Warszawa, 1988), 137.

402 Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 402.

403 The strike went on for 10 days, until 25 August and involved cutting off food supplies to towns and cities. Armed peasant 'militias' enforced the bans with road blockades and violence. The state responded by throwing numbers at the problem and with equal brutality. The overall reported peasant death toll was 40+. Szembek's contemporary account talks about 41 victims: Jozef Zaranski, (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka* [*Diary and Papers of Jan Szembek*], vol.3, (London, 1969), 355. Most history texts, however, talk about 44 dead. See for example: Ludwik Malinowski, *Politycy II Rzeczpospolitej. Sluzba i zycie prywatne* [*Politicians of the Second Republic. Their service and private lives*], Vol. 2, (Torun, 1995), 124.
However, repressions (e.g.: house searches which ended in damage and demolition) continued until the end of the year. Kordian Zamorski, who wanted to resign from his office as Chief of Police describes the events in his diary: Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 403-414. For more detailed information about the strike refer to: Kazimierz Przybos, Jozef Hempel and Boleslaw Deren (ed.), *Strajk chlopski w Malopolsce w sierpniu 1937 r.* [*The peasants' strike in Lesser Poland, August 1937*], (Warszaawa, 1988); Wilhelmina Matuszewska and Stanislawa Leblang (ed.), *Strajk chlopski w 1937 roku: dokumenty archiwalne* [*The 1937 peasants' strike: A review of archival sources*], vol. 1 & 2, (Warszawa, 1960); Felicjan Slawoj-Skladkowski, *Nie ostatnie slowo oskarzonego* [*The accused's one but last word*], (London, 1964).

Until the summer of 1937, any cooperation between Pilsudskites and the National Democrats had been unthinkable. Indeed, to quote Sir Howard Kennard 'it [was] notorious that Pilsudski and his closer collaborators always hated the National Democrats more fiercely than any of the other political opponents and that the very mention of Dmowski was enough to throw the Marshal into a rage.'[404] According to some, the rivalry between Pilsudski and Dmowski dates back to 1890s. When, upon his return to Vilnius, Pilsudski met, and later married, Dmowski's love interest Maria Juszkiewicz.[405] However, the movement-wide hostility could be traced back to ideological differences during the struggle for Polish independence.[406] It was further exacerbated after November 1918 when Pilsudski's seizure of control over the newly

[404] Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 11 Aug. 1937, TNA, C 58872455, FO 371/20757.

[405] Roman Wapinski, *Roman Dmowski* (Lublin, 1989), 65.

[406] Although he was an ideological opportunist, Pilsudski's vision for an independent Poland remained broadly unchanged throughout his life. Brought up in a very patriotic household, the future Marshal was inspired by Polish history and armed struggle for independence. He held a romanticised vision of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which, he believed, could be reconstructed in the form of the Intermarium (Miedzymorze). A Polish-led federation stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic and the Black Sea, and including Lithuania (and other Baltic states), Ukraine, Belarus, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Romania. Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 67-68; a detailed analysis of Pilsudskite federalist ideas can be found in Piotr Okulewicz, *Koncepcja 'Miedzymorza' w mysli i praktyce politycznej obozu Jozefa Pilsudskiego w latach 1918-1926*, [*The Concept of 'Intermarium' in the ideological thought and politics of Jozef Pilsudski's camp between 1918 and 1926*], (Poznan, 2011).
In contrast to Pilsudski's bellicosity and his dream of an ethnically diverse and territorially vast Poland, Dmowski's proposals were much more modest. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, his National Democrats' goal was Polish autonomy within the Russian Empire. After the outbreak of the war, while Pilsudski initially fought under the auspices of the Central Powers, Dmowski settled in Paris where his Polish National Committee promoted the idea of an independent Polish state among the Entente powers. Unlike Pilsudski's, however, Dmowski's Poland was to be smaller and ethnically homogeneous. Roman Wapiniski, 'Idea narodu w mysli spolecznej i politycznej endecji przed rokiem 1918,' ['The nation as an idea in National Democratic social and political thought before 1918'] in Janusz Gockowski and Andrzej Walicki, (ed.), *Idee i koncepcje narodu w polskiej mysli politycznej czasow porozbiorowych* [*The concepts and ideas of nationhood in Polish post-partition political thought*], (Warszawa, 1977), 224; Andrzej Walicki, *The Three Traditions in Polish Patriotism and Their Contemporary Relevance*, (Bloomington, 1988), 23-24.

independent Poland took the Paris based Dmowski and his Polish National Committee by surprise.[407]

However, unlike their older comrades, the new generation of nationalists who formed the National Radical Camp (ONR-Falanga)[408] were not repulsed by the prospect of collaboration with Old Pilsudskites.[409] On 18 May 1937, one of the ONR leaders, Aleksander Heinrich was delighted to welcome Marshal Rydz-Smigly to the annual congress of the student corporation 'Arconia.'[410] The hall was full to bursting. This traditionally national and conservative organisation had by then moved to the right and was dominated by militant nationalists. Thus, considering that he was not an 'old Arconian', Rydz-Smigly's presence at the corporation's commers was a clear indication that the Camp of National Unity was extending an invitation to the National Democrats. The practical-minded ONR leader, twenty-two year old Boleslaw Piasecki, accepted this proffered hand and on 22 June 1937, OZN's youth organisation: the Union of Young Poland, was born.

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[407] Taking advantage of the absence of his chief competitor, Pilsudski bullied the Prusso- Austro-Hungarian Regency Council into declaring him Chief of State and then forced the body's dissolution. This resulted in protestations and accusations of illegality from Dmowski. Davies, *God's Playground*, 286.

[408] The precise name of the organisation was the National Radical Movement (RNR) – Falanga. It emerged in 1935 after the ONR split into the predominantly young RNR-Falanga and an older ONR – ABC. However, since the amalgamation 'ONR-Falanga' is generally used to describe nationalist youth collaboration with the OZN in the historiography of the period, this author will also use this name.

[409] Indeed, despite conservative and nationalist orientation, the arrival of the OZN was greeted with hostility by many National Democratic circles and the party's official newspaper *Warszawski Dziennik Narodowy* [*Warsaw's National Daily*] published a critique of the OZN's programme declaration condemning the Camp's 'soft' stance on 'the Jewish problem'. Edward D. Wynot Jr., 'A Necessary Cruelty': The emergence of official anti-Semitism in Poland 1936-39', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 76 (4), (October 1971), 1040.

[410] Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne lata trzydzieste* [*The beautiful Thirties*], (Warsaw, 2008), 230; Photographs of the event are available in Polish National Digital Archive. NAC Zespol: Doroczny komers korporacji studenckiej Arconia w Warszawie, 1/N/3614/1-5.

Unwittingly, instead of broadening the regime's support base, cosying up to the National Democrats, meant that the OZN locked itself in a vicious cycle. For, as one Foreign Office recipient of Francis Aveling's August dispatch quickly recognised: 'The Legionaries are unwilling to share their power with the National Democrats, and the stronger their unwillingness become the more Koc is forced to depend on the National Democrats (…).'[411] Indeed, Koc's new deputy, a young National Democrat called Jerzy Rutkowski, who presided over the Young Poles, was allowed to openly question the Piludskite tradition, causing first the alienation of the pro-Sanacja youth and later[412] forcing the resignation of Koc's Chief of Staff, a Pilsudskite, Colonel Jan Kowalewski.[413]

Another ready consequence of the inclusion of the volatile ONR-Falanga in the political process was a growing fear of a violent coup among the regime's elite. The Falangists' were partial to violent outbursts and their chief ideologue, Boleslaw Piasecki, believed that a systemic change could only be ushered in in the aftermath of a violent 'breakthrough'.[414] The panic reached its peak in late October 1937 when whispers about an upcoming 'St Bartholomew's Night' of Rydz-Smigly's political opponents swept through Warsaw like bush fire. Foreign diplomats reported that

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[411] Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 11 Aug. 1937, TNA, C 58872455, FO 371/20759.

[412] Andrzej Micewski, 'Polish youth in the Thirties', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1969), 166.

[413] In protest against the regime's detente with the National Democrats, Kowalewski threatened to resign from his post. He was swiftly recalled back to the Ministry of War and replaced with colonel Wenda. A thoroughly unsavoury individual whose 'reputation for unscrupulousness' forged by his alleged involvement in the 'disappearance' of general Zagorski. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 2 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 76292455, FO 371/20760. Interestingly, Rydz-Smigly was supposedly not only aware of these allegations but also convinced of their accuracy from as early as 1934. Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 297.

[414] The outbreaks were mainly anti-Semitic in nature. The concerted efforts of the ONR and other nationalist organisations eventually led to the introduction of the so-called 'Bench Ghettos' on Polish universities in the later part of the 1930s. Garlicki, *Piekne lata*, 232-233.

President Moscicki, Slawek and Pilsudski's widow Aleksandra headed the alleged list of five hundred targeted individuals. The sense of hysteria that night is conveyed in the diary of the Chief of Police Kordian Zamorski, which records a flurry of contradicting reports. Some warned him that 40.000 'Young Poles' were receiving illicit paramilitary training while others accused him of overseeing it.[415] In the end, the coup did not materialise and no documents have been discovered that would confirm that the OZN did indeed plan to violently overthrow the regime.

What is certain, however, is that before leaving on his official visit to Romania,[416] Marshal Rydz-Smigly confronted President Moscicki and demanded the dismissal of the current Skladkowski cabinet. Sources are not unanimous in identifying the proposed new Prime Minister, but considering that his proposed replacements were Justice Minister Grabowski or Military Affairs Minister Kasprzycki, one could be certain that the new government would have been a more hardline one.[417] To escape the pressure, Moscicki feigned illness and left Warsaw. And while the coup never materialised, it did nevertheless slightly damage Rydz-Smigly's reputation. Thus, it was presumably on Rydz-Smigly's strict instructions that Koc publicly disassociated the Camp from the Falangists as soon as the marshal returned home from Bucharest

[415] Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 430-434.

[416] Edward Rydz-Smigly visited Romania between 24 and 27 October 1937.

[417] According to Tadeusz Jedruszczak, Grabowski believed in the disposal of political opponents, de-legalising the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), appropriation of Jewish property and an introduction of a Polish version of the Nuremberg Laws. Tadeusz Jedruszczak, *Pilsudczycy bez Pilsudskiego: Powstanie Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego w 1937 roku* [The Pilsudskites without Pilsudski: The Raise of the Camp of National Unity in 1937], (Warszawa, 1963), 197. British dispatches, which pointed to Kasprzycki as Skladkowski's replacement also noted that Polish diplomats suggested that Poland's possible new regime would be 'strong'. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 2 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 76292455, FO 371/20760; also William Strang's memo on the cover page of the above cited document.

on 27 October 1937. The Colonel would himself be pushed out at the end of the year and replaced by the reportedly more placid General Stanislaw Skwarczynski.

Earlier, we mentioned the opinions of Beck's contemporaries who indicated that the minister struggled to come to terms with the OZN and Rydz-Smigly's attempts to dismantle the Pilsudskite Sanacja. The brief overview of the Camp's activity showed the reader that Beck was not only right but also not alone in decrying the increasing importance of militant nationalism and anti-Semitism which came to dominate the political discourse in Poland. As an old Pilsudskite, it is unlikely that the Minister would ever find cooperation with the National Democrats justified and the fact that its aim was to further weaken the likes of Slawek must have made it even harder. But, judging by his reaction, nothing could have set Beck any more against the OZN and raised his suspicions of Rydz-Smigly than the seemingly trivial matter of Pilsudski's coffin.

On 23 June 1937, incensed by the endless crowds trampling over his church, the archbishop prince Adam Sapieha - bishop of Krakow and deacon of the Wawel cathedral - unilaterally decided to move Jozef Pilsudski's coffin from its temporary resting place in St Leonard's crypt to the remodeled Silver Bells tower.[418] Barely two years after the Marshal's death, this indelicate act, about which Sapieha informed the family and authorities only afterwards, was considered 'an earthquake.'[419] Swaths of

[418] The initial plan was to relocate the coffin but there was no official permission to do so. Neither was one forthcoming. Neal Pease, 'The 'Unpardonable Insult': The Wawel Incident of 1937 and the Church-State Relations in Poland', *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol.77, no.3 (July 1991), 426-427.

[419] Parliamentary debate on 20 July 1937, quoted after Peal, 'The Unpardonable Insult', 423.

the public responded with disgust, anger and even, in the case of Pilsudski's staunchest supporters, violence.[420] The reactions of the regime's elite were, sometimes, no less extreme. Prime Minister Skladkowski was so overcame by the cleric's offending deed that he tended in his resignation just 24 hours later.[421] Beck, who as we already know was not one for histrionics, behaved more calmly but was no less shocked. Indeed, according to his secretary Pawel Starzenski, the Minister was momentarily stunned by the news. Seemingly perturbed, Beck arrived at the office earlier than usual: 'Sapieha's gone mad' was apparently all he could muster leaving the staffers to find out what exactly happened and which of the members of the Sapieha dynasty had upset their boss.[422]

Ever loyal, Starzenski goes on to say that although Beck remained quietly angry with the archbishop, he was able to rise above the quarrel and focused on averting an open conflict between the Catholic Church and the state.[423] However, another account suggests that the Minister was a little less generous. Walerian Meysztowicz, a priest, who was at the time working as Councilor at the Polish Embassy in the Vatican, recalls in his memoir that the Foreign Ministry actively sought to remove Sapieha from Krakow and the local Charge d'Affaires Stanislaw Janikowski was instructed to intervene with the Pope to this effect.[424] But even though Pius XI knew Sapieha from his time as the Nuncio to Poland and was no friend of his, the pontiff did not want to demote the archbishop. A compromise had to be agreed speedily – in

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[420] A demonstrating mob smashed the windows in the archbishop's palace on 26 June. Peal, 'The Unpardonable Insult', 430.
[421] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Jun. 1937,TNA, C 46412455, FO 371/20759.
[422] Pawel Starzenski, *Trzy lata z* Beckiem [*Three years with Beck*], (Warszawa, 1991), 48.
[423] Ibid., 48.
[424] Waclaw Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o czasach i ludziach przedwojennych,* [*Stories of times and people of the Second Polish Republic*], (London, 1983), 308.

time for the visit of Romanian King Karol that was to include a stop at Pilsudski's sarcophagus.

As we know, Poland's image was high on Beck's list of priorities, but it is possible that on this occasion he was also pressurised by the Camp of National Unity to reach a swift compromise with the church. Through a brilliant stroke of luck, Sapieha, a self-declared National Democrat, committed his 'transgression' just a day after the formation of the Union of Young Poland formalised the alliance between Rydz-Smigly's Camp and the Falangists. Unwilling and, as noted earlier, increasingly unable, the OZN could ill afford to alienate either the National Democrats or Roman Catholics. After the nationalist and conservative press criticised the authorities' handling of the affair,[425] Colonel Koc's condemnation of Sapieha's hasty action was rather less strong that those of prominent Old Pilsudskites.[426] Most significantly however, Marshal Rydz-Smigly maintained utter silence on the matter. For a man as devoted to Pilsudski as Beck was, this lack of reaction from the Marshal's self-styled heir must have seemed not only disrespectful but also served as another reminder that Sanacja's legacy was under threat.

From a burial, to a bombing, to a Congress, to a peasant revolt and an attempted coup, the tribulations of the next few months caused the rift between Beck and Rydz-Smigly to reopen. Indeed, the 'truce' and shaking of hands of the previous summer all

[425] In his report, ambassador Kennard mentions the reaction of Nationalist *Kurjer Warszawski* [*Warsaw's Courier*] and conservative *Czas* [*Time*]. Two issues of *Czas* were confiscated by the authorities, the paper forced to retract its first editorial. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 30 Jun. 1937. TNA, C 482621355, FO 371/20764.

[426] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 30 Jun. 1937. TNA, C 482621355, FO 371/20764.

but forgotten, in November 1937 the growing tension forced Beck to reassure senior Ministry officials that 'no differences exist[ed] between him and Marshal [Rydz-] Smigly.'[427] There were to be no further truces.

As readers will remember from the introduction, the key argument put forward against the existence of a significant conflict between Beck and Rydz-Smigly is that their differences were minor and few. Indeed, the dearth of diaries and private correspondence makes it more difficult to track the progress of their disagreement. But, as this thesis has already illustrated, looking at other available sources, a researcher can reconstruct enough of Beck and Rydz-Smigly's views to understand the essence of their conflict, which was, to a large extent, domestic, with Pilsudski's legacy at its core. Of course, we have already seen that it had some effect on Polish foreign policy. On the positive side, Rydz-Smigly's determination to reactivate the Franco-Polish cooperation kick-started that stalled alliance. Its negative effect was that Rydz-Smigly's growing interference in diplomatic matters only added to Beck's resolve to adhere to the Marshal's directive to perform a 'balancing act' even as that became less and less feasible.

Yet it is likely that it was a domestic, if not downright personal, matter that stoked Beck's desire to protect his independence from the increasingly invasive Rydz-Smigly.

From the previous chapter we already know that the Minister was the last person seen by the dying Pilsudski. After years of grooming for the post, Beck enjoyed Pilsudski's unequivocal support as Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs. So

[427] Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 402.

unequivocal, that even on his deathbed the Marshal imprinted a seal of approval on his pupil. And although it was initially widely acknowledged by the Sanacja adherents that Polish diplomacy should stay in Beck's hands, Rydz-Smigly's increasing interest in the matter was yet another indication that some within the regime were moving beyond strict application of Pilsudskite directives. In other words, although more discreet, to a devoted old-Pilsduskite like Beck, the quiet struggle for control over Polish foreign policy doctrine was no less an ideological transgression than the shift of the OZN towards the right.

Both men's attitudes to Pilsudski's legacy aside, there naturally existed particular issues on which the two simply did not see eye to eye. One of these, which we have already covered, was their perception of France. Another was their attitude to Hitler, upon which we have already briefly touched in the previous chapter. General Gamelin's clumsy efforts to get Edward Rydz-Smigly to commit on Czechoslovakia during his September 1936 visit to France resulted from the French intelligence that Rydz-Smigly disagreed with the pro-German orientation of Beck's foreign policy.[428] And of course, Beck's perception of Hitler was at the centre of this diplomatic doctrine.

During the 1920s and very early 1930s Polish-German relations were very poor. Although the severity of incidents varied from major (the 1925 customs-war) to very

[428] See Chapter Three, page 117.

minor (the abrupt 1933 dissolution of independent Port Police in Danzig and plans to replace it with the city's Schutzpolizei).[429]

This last incident served as a pretext to reinforce the Polish military contingent based on Danzig's Westerplatte peninsula. Sometimes interpreted as an indication that Jozef Pilsudski wanted a preventive war with Germany, the deployment took place overnight between 5 and 6 March 1933 – just as votes in the German post-Reichstag-Fire election were being counted. Indeed, far from being a bellicose action, the reinforcement was more likely an attempt by Marshal Pilsudski to test the Nazi leadership's reaction.[430] Their silence and lack of support for the protest the Danziger Authorities lodged in Geneva seemed different and encouraging. Less than a year later, on 26 January 1934, Warsaw and Berlin would sign a Non-Aggression Pact.[431]

In fact, as we will see in the following chapters, Minister Beck did not abandon this idea that Hitler was 'different' until the summer of 1939. For how else could the future Minister, who prior to this 'game-changing' agreement, experienced open German hostility of the Stresseman era, describe an Austrian with a clear dislike of Prussian aristocracy who was making conciliatory gestures to Poland?

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[429] Wlodzimierz Moderow, former Danzig civil servant, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 12 Jan. 1942, PISM A11.49/cz/3/12; Waclaw Jedrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939. Papers and Memoirs of Jozef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland*, (New York, 1968), 47-49; Christoph Kimmich, *The Free City. Danzig and German Foreign Policy 1919-1934*, (New Haven, 1968), 61-62 and 130-132.

[430] Jozef Lipski, former Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 28 Feb. 1941, PISM A.11.49/cz/3/10.

[431] Anna Cienciala, 'Polish Foreign Policy, 1926-1939. 'Equilibrium'; Stereotype and Reality' *The Polish Review*, 20 (1), (1975), 42-57; Gerhard Weinberg, *The foreign policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36*, (Chicago, 1970), 58-73.

Researching Polish foreign policy in the 1930s one is repeatedly reminded that Beck thought he could trust Hitler. This of course was partly due to the Fuhrer's diligence in sticking to the letter of the Pact and the charm offensive launched by him and other high-ranking Nazis. The official German reaction to Marshal Pilsudski's death mentioned in chapter three was one example of this charm offensive, but there were plenty of other manifestations of the Nazis' sympathy towards Poland.

Hitler's apparent recognition that Warsaw was an important and equal partner in Europe was another example of his unparalleled ability to push Beck's buttons,[432] while frequent official and private visits, where Polish and German dignitaries were treated to shooting parties[433] or granted special access to art collections, naturally helped to maintain the friendly atmosphere.[434] But pleasantries and Hitler's apparent distance from the 'excesses of some junior Nazis',[435] were not the sole reason why, in early March 1939, Beck supposedly felt confident enough to have the following exchange with his Romanian counterpart Grigore Gafencu.

Asked about the Polish-German relations the Minister reportedly replied:

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[432] Pawel Starzenski gives us an excellent example of this technique recounting Beck's conversation with Hitler during the Minister's July 1935 visit to Berlin, in which the Fuhrer told the minister that Germany's two most important international partners are Britain globally and Poland in Europe. Significantly, France – so disliked by Beck for its patronising attitude toward Warsaw – was not mentioned. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 125. The Poles were also still angry with France after the Stresa conference and concerned about it's renewed ties with Soviet Russia. Weinberg, The foreign policy of Hitler's Germany, 208-209.

[433] Personally, Beck loathed hunting but the Ministry helped to stage Presidential shoots for visiting Goering and Himmler. The MFA also organised, and paid for, the staggeringly expensive shoots on private estates for Goering. According to Chief of Police Zamorski, a passionate shot, in 1938 a private shooting party at an aristocratic estate cost 1500 zloty per head. Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 446; This was equal to the monthly salary of a Major General. Ministry of Military Affairs, 'Announcement of a unified military pay-scale' from 4 January 1937 published in *Dziennik Ustaw 1937*, vol. 8, item 66, 79.

[434] Upon meeting Hitler and telling him that he was a fellow painter, the Chief of Police Zamorski was granted special access to all art collections and public buildings in Munich. Zamorski, *Dzienniki*, 497.

[435] Beck quoted in Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 54.

- Everything is fine. We have no disagreements.

- What about Danzig?

- It doesn't matter.

- And the German re-armament?

- It's not directed against Poland.

- You sound as if you have an agreement with Germany.

- I have no agreements, but I trust Hitler. He has some large ambitions for Europe.[436]

The secret to Beck's misplaced confidence was in fact that he thought that Hitler, like himself, was committed to pursuing a single coherent line of policy. In other words, that Bolshephobia was Hitler's equivalent of Beck's Pilsudskite commitment to maintaining a diplomatic equilibrium.

As we will see in the next chapter, this underlying conviction became more apparent just as Hitler started to undermine it. But even as Hitler renounced the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact and a steady flow of intelligence warning about a possible Nazi-Soviet détente arrived in Warsaw, (leading the Minister to cry

[436] As quoted by Miroslaw Arciszewski, fromer second Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland, in his statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1942. PISM, A.11.49/cz/3/1. Arciszewski's statement was made from memory and it is possible that the former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs was miss-remembering or deliberately embellishing his account. However, statements by several other Beck's contemporaries suggests that the Minister may have put too much trust in Hitler. Even as late as summer 1939, Beck told Starzenski that Hitler's hostile policy could largely be attributed to Ribbentrop. Starzenski, *Trzy* lata, 125; Jan Gawronski, the Polish ambassador to Vienna, also believed that Beck trusted Hitler and said so in a conversation with Rydz-Smigly in early February 1938. Jan Gawronski, *Moja misja w Wiedniu 1932-38* [*My posting in Vienna 1932-38*], (Warszawa, 1965), 480.

'Where is Hitler's foreign policy now?') he was still inclined to blame the dictator's decisions on Ribbentrop's poor advice and manipulation.[437]

Just as he would come to realize, we now know that Beck's assessment of Hitler was off the mark. In his defence one could only say that, compared to other contemporary statesmen, his was not an unusual view.

Edward Rydz-Smigly was, however, one of the few exceptions to this norm. Upon assuming his position at the head of the Armed Forces, Rydz-Smigly, despite his limited knowledge of Germany,[438] was nonetheless suspicious of the country's motives.[439] This attitude goes some way to explain the Marshal's reluctance to forge a relationship with Ambassador Hans von Moltke and the German Embassy in Warsaw.[440] A phenomenon that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, paradoxically helped the pro-German Beck to stay in office.[441]

The Nazi authorities were of course aware of Rydz-Smigly's distrust. Their previously fool proof tactic of praising Marshal Pilsudski, was, unsurprisingly, less

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[437] Beck cited in Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 125.

[438] Even after a year in the GISZ and a few weeks before his promotion to marshal, in late October 1936, Rydz-Smigly reportedly had a very limited idea about the current state of Polish-German relations. This surprised ambassador Jozef Lipski who later told Janusz Jedrzejewicz that: ' Rydz-Smigly seemed to believe that our [Polish] embassy [in Berlin] is surrounded by hostility and isolated.' Janusz Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie idei* [*In idea's service*], (London, 1972), 316.

[439] In a conversation with Jan Szembek on 8 October 1935 Rydz-Smigly approved of the Polish-German détente but believed that the country's intentions towards Poland were, ultimately, hostile. Tytus Komarnicki, (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki Jana* Szembeka (1935-1945), Vol. 1, (London, 1964), 364.

[440] On, 22 October 1936, the same day he recorded the conversation with Lipski mentioned above, Jedrzejewicz also noted an exchange with distressed Moltke whom Rydz-Smigly still failed to receive. Jedrzejewicz, *W sluzbie,* 316.

[441] Jan Szembek's diary suggests that Rydz-Smigly's prejudices were reinforced by people hostile to the Minister. Speaking with Szembek on 5 October, Rydz-Smigly himself that he knew Moltke very little and was reluctant to forge closer relations with the German because a reliable source (Beck's predecessor August Zaleski) informed him that Moltke received general Sikorski. Komarnicki, (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, Vol. 1, 298.

effective with Rydz-Smigly than it was with Beck. To combat this, the leadership in Berlin was at pains to charm and personally engage with the new marshal and 1937 was the height of this 'campaign'.

When Rydz-Smigly was ill early in the year, Hitler enquired about his health and sent his best wishes through ambassador Lipski.[442] In mid-February, marshal Goering visited Rydz-Smigly and during their first conversation tried to convince him of Germany's commitment to good relations with Poland. Hinting not only at a media campaign that would change the public perception of Poland in Germany but denying all territorial claims including the corridor.[443]

Undoubtedly, gauging the new Marshal's attitude towards Germany was the sole purpose of Goering's visit. Its most important part was the floating of the idea of Poland joining the Anti-Commintern Pact. Unsurprisingly, Rydz-Smigly was not overly enthusiastic about the proposal and it appears that from that point onwards, instead of trying to win Rydz-Smigly over, the German authorities attempted to use his rift with Beck to their advantage, applying more pressure on the Minister while reassuring the Marshal.[444]

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[442] Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 11 Jan. 1937, PISM A11.49/N/6.

[443] Minutes from a meeting between Hermann Goering, Premier of the Third Reich, and Edward Rydz-Smigly, General Inspector for the Armed Foreces of Poland, 16 Feb. 1937, PISM, A11.49/N/6.

[444] For example when, following the proclamation of Declarations on Minority Rights, ambassador Lipski was received by Hitler on 5 November 1937, the Chancellor requested that his assurances that the status quo in Danzig and Polish interests in the city will not be challenged, are communicated to marshal Rydz-Smigly. Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 5 Nov. 1937. PISM, A.11/49/N/6.

The German pressure had three sources: Danzig, minorities and the Poles' hatred of the Soviet Union. In Danzig, although the Polish authorities had previously resigned themselves to the fact that 'the totalitarian Nazi system would govern the life of the Free City' and concluded that 'no useful purpose would be served by endeavouring to hinder or delay it,' subtle Nazi attempts to undermine the status quo incited the Camp of National Unity into the nationalistic outburst described above.[445]

First came the aforementioned attempts to amend the Free City's constitution. This was followed by a flurry of anti-Polish outbursts in Danzig and neighbouring villages. This time the targets extended beyond the usual students to include ordinary adult Poles and, most controversially, children whom new regulation compelled to attend German schools.[446] The plight of a number of Polish school children who were either forcefully removed from their houses or kidnapped by policemen and Nazi activists and taken to German schools attracted extensive coverage in Polish press and outraged the public.[447]

Like Rydz-Smigly, Polish opinion had always been suspicious of Minister Beck's pro-German policy line and condemnation of repeated racist excesses coming from

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[445] After Tadeusz Gwiazdoski, Head of the League of Nations section in the Polish Foreign Ministry, whose 20 April. 1937 conversation with Francis Aveling is cited in ambassador Kennard's report. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador to Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 21 Apr. 1937. TNA, C 3086555, FO 371/20757.

[446] For example, on 31 October 1937, a group of Polish schoolchildren were beaten up on by four German youths. Gerald Shepherd, British Consul General in Danzig, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 10 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 7972555, FO 371/20759; Similarly, on 1 November 1937, a group of Poles walking home after a choir practice was attacked. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Sir Orme Sargent, Assistant Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 3 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 7631555, FO 371/20758.

[447] Cases of children taken away from homes in their parents absence, police searches and citizens' arrests, snatching of children being taken to school by their parents, document control imposed on children passing through rail stations and fines levied on parents of Polish school children are described in the protest note presented to the President of the Danzig Senate by Polish members of the Volkstag. Translation included in Arthur Francis Aveling, Counselor in the British Embassy in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 2 Sept. 1937, TNA, C 6280555, FO 371/20758. See also, Paul McNamara, *Sean Lester, Poland and the Nazi takeover of Danzig*, (Dublin, 2009), 173 – 176.

all journalistic directions including the conservative *Czas* and Sanacja-mouthpiece *Gazeta Polska* put the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an unwelcome spotlight. And, for all their flattery, their praise of Beck's qualities and statesmanship, and their singling out ambassador Lipski as the first among equals in Berlin's diplomatic circles, the German authorities only paid lip service to Polish requests to curb Gauleiter Albert Forster[448] and his Danzig Nazi Party, and proved unwilling to bilaterally settle the minority problem.[449] Indeed, the first Polish attempt to organise an exchange of notes about Danzig was unsuccessful. The Berlin's authorities' refusal was communicated to Beck in a top-secret, 'For the Minister's eyes only' message from Jozef Lipski.[450]

The rising ethnic tensions in Danzig coincided with constant German allusions to Poland acceding to the Anti-Commintern Pact. The author deliberately describes Berlin's attempts to get Warsaw to join the anti-Soviet grouping as 'allusions' because they were somewhat secretive. They involved veiled warnings about dangers lurking in the east and visions of a vast, nearly pre-partition-like Poland stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea.[451] However, that Poland was not formally invited to join the anti-Soviet grouping suggests that the German obstruction was an attempt to take advantage of the tension in Poland's internal politics. No matter how pressurised, Beck could never accept an open invitation to join an alliance directed

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[448] Albert Forster was, since 1930, the Nazi Party Leader (Gauleiter) in the Free City of Danzig.

[449] Goering laid high praise on both Beck and Lipski during his meeting with Jan Szembek in November 1937. Minutes from the meeting between Jan Szembek, Deputy Foreign Minister in Warsaw, and Herman Goering, Premier of the Third Reich in Berlin, 4 Nov. 1937, PISM A.11.49/N/6.

[450] Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 7 Oct.1937, PISM A.11.49/N/6.

[451] Goering cited in the Minutes from the meeting between Jan Szembek, Deputy Foreign Minister in Warsaw, and Hermann Goering, Premier of the Third Reich in Berlin, 4 Nov. 1937, PISM A.11.49/N/6.

against a neighbour because, among other things, it ran counter to Pilsudski's line. A rejection would have naturally embarrassed the Reich and complicated relations between Warsaw and Berlin. It is plausible therefore to assume that the Nazi authorities fabricated and prolonged the Danzig minority crisis to further weaken Beck's position within the Sanacja regime in the hope of pressing him into forging an ever-closer collaboration with Berlin and align himself, possibly covertly, against the Soviet Union.[452]

In the end, and despite efforts by certain Russian historians to have us believe otherwise, the tactic failed.[453] In early November 1937, just days after Beck marked his fifth year in office, Warsaw and Berlin agreed to coordinate the issue of separate declarations in which each side agreed to respect the rights of their respective minorities.[454]

The media coverage of Beck's ministerial anniversary focused on international tributes to the Minister and emphasised his devotion to the principles of Marshal

[452] Beck's contacts in Berlin and ability to work with Germany were, or were presented as, the main reasons for keeping him in office after Pilsudski's death by members of conflicted Mosciki's and Rydz-Smigly's cliques.

[453] The allegation that a secret Ribbentrop-Beck Pact directed against the Soviet Union existed was most recently made by the controversial Russian historian Aleksandr Dukov in his *Pakt Molotova-Ribbentropa v voprosakh I otvetah* [*The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pack in questions and answers*], (Moscow, 2009). The allegations were also the subject of a Russian documentary, *Taini sekrietnih prtokolov* [*The secrets of the confidential protocols*], broadcast in 2009 by the state-owned 'Rossiya' television channel. However, the authenticity of the documents presented in these to substantiate their claims has been widely questioned including by two prominent historians of Polish-Soviet relations: Slawomir Debski and Marius Wolos. A recent controversial and highly critical of Minister Beck publication by Piotr Zychowicz argues that such an agreement should have existed. Piotr Zychowicz, *Pakt Ribbentrop-Beck, czyli jak Polacy mogli u boku III Rzeszy pokonac Zwiazek Sowiecki* [*Ribbentrop – Beck Pact, or how Poland could have defeated the Soviet Union by the Reich's side*], (Warszawa, 2012).

[454] For a more detailed account of these negotiations, see Gerhard Weinberg, 'German Foreign Policy and Poland, 1937-1938', *The Polish Review*, 20 (1), (1975), 12-14.

Pilsudski.[455] But the recent crisis's notoriety clearly undermined Beck's prestige. In a bid to reassert the validity of his line, the Minister issued one of his rare communications to all Polish diplomatic representatives in which he reassuringly presented the declaration as part of a gradual process of improvement in Polish-German relations rather than the contingent reaction to a crisis it actually was.[456] An additional editorial aimed at restoring Beck's credibility before the public appeared in *Gazeta Polska* within a fortnight of the declarations.[457] It took the line expressed in Beck's communiqué and exaggerated the declaration's importance.

For a secretive man who shrank away from having to explain his foreign policy to others – be they people from outside his MFA inner-circle or parliamentarians – inspiring such a legitimising editorial seems completely out of character and can only be explained as political maneuvering, especially if we consider that Beck not only attempted to rally his subordinates and communicate with the wider public but also engaged with a specific influential group. According to a semi-private letter from Roman Debicki[458] to Jan Szembek, the Minister had in late autumn 1937 met up with young aristocrats 'to exchange thoughts',[459] prompting Debicki to enthuse about the benefits Poland would reap if Beck developed these bright young things' potential and 'created a moderate centre'.[460] Information about further meetings or

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[455] Beck assumed the Foreign Affairs portfolio on 2 November 1932. Foreign and domestic response to Beck's jubilee are described in British diplomatic reports. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in London, 9 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 79602455, FO 371/20760.

[456] Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, to all senior Polish diplomats abroad, 5 Nov. 1937 PISM, A.11.49/N/6.

[457] 'Sprawy Gdanskie' ['The matters in Danzig'], cutting from *Gazeta Polska*, 17 Nov. 1937 PISM, A.11.49/N/6.

[458] The Polish Envoy to Yugoslavia between 1935 and 1939.

[459] Roman Debicki, Polish Envoy in Belgrade, response to Jan Szembek, Deputy Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 18 Nov. 1937, PISM, A.11.E/1494. The author was unable to locate Szembek's original letter.

[460] Roman Debicki, Polish Envoy in Belgrade, response to Jan Szembek, Deputy Foreign Minister in

whether other groups were approached could not be found, and a moderate centre never emerged.[461] Nevertheless, the episode perfectly demonstrates the shift in Beck's and Smigly-Rydz's relations over the course of 1937. Sudden and uncharacteristic concern about public opinion and attempts to engage with the conservative ruling classes suggest that Beck felt increasingly threatened and isolated by the rising Rydz-Smigly.

Beck's weakening was exacerbated by the decline in the President's power relative to the Marshal's. In the previous chapter we saw that President Ignacy Moscicki was a useful counterweight to the new Marshal. However, as the rivalry between the Castle and the General Inspectorate intensified in the aftermath of OZN's 'fascist coup' attempt, the President became more concerned with reinforcing his own position rather than someone else's. Indeed, in his attempt to populate the government with 'his people', Moscicki even suggested Michal Grazynski, the Voivode of Upper Silesia, for Prime Minister.[462] He was in the end unsuccessful but proposing Grazynski meant acquiescing in removing Beck from the Cabinet. The two men allegedly hated each other and could not work together. So even if, unlikely

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Warsaw, 18 Nov. 1937, PISM, A.11.E/1494 [you can use Ibid]

[461] According to the former Industry and Trade Minister, Henryk Floyar-Rajchman, Beck 'intrigued' with a different wing of the National Democrats. Foreign Office minute by Reginald (Rex) Leeper, Head of the Foreign Office News Department in London, to Orme Sargent, Assistant Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, and William Strang, Head of the Central Department of the Foreign Office in London, 17 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 79192455, FO 371/20760; However, Howard Kennard discredited Rajchman's credibility on the grounds of the latter's intense dislike of Beck and his 'evident [desire] to blacken him as much as possible.' Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Orme Sargent, Assistant Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in London, 30 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 83542455, FO 371/20760.

[462] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary in London, 2 Nov. 1937, TNA, C 76292455, FO 371/20760.

as it was, Grazynski invited Beck to join his cabinet, the Minister was hardly going to accept it.[463]

At the beginning of this chapter, 1937 was dubbed the 'quiet' year, but upon closer examination it proved to have been anything but quiet in terms of Polish domestic politics. Indeed, defined by the formation of the Camp of National Unity, it was a year of increasing discord and profound political change. A manifestation of and a vehicle for Rydz-Smigly's newly found political ambition, the OZN never gained the Old Pilsudskites' favour. Beck was particularly put off by the Camp's chauvinistic nationalism, fuelled by its flirtation with the radical ONR, which ran counter to Pilsudskite ideology. His refusal to join Rydz-Smigly's new movement only worsened the already poor relations with the Marshal. This flaring up of the conflict coincided with the German manipulation attempts their direct approaches to Rydz-Smigly and a manufactured crisis in Danzig that showed Beck up in front of the establishment. As the Minister's weakness was exposed, Marshal Rydz-Smigly made his first, timid, but nonetheless open interference in the process of Polish-German policy making – until then Beck's sole domain. And despite being able to stave off a confrontation with Berlin over Danzig, no amount of 'success propaganda' could hide that, as 1937 drew to a close, the Foreign Minister was entering the New Year weaker than he had been 12 months earlier. His efforts to rebuild his position would, as we shall see in the following chapter, result in several diplomatic initiatives being given a populist spin.

[463] According to Gawronski, Mosciki returned to his idea of making Grazynski PM in February 1938.Gawronski, *Moja Misja*, 479.

Marshal Rydz-Smigly was not on the other hand much affected by the initial failure of his venture. He remained popular with the Armed Forces and, owing to his ongoing campaign of personal propaganda, a large section of the public. Despite the confrontation with Moscicki, the Marshal was still regarded as his natural successor and was expected to assume the powerful Presidential office in 1940. But events would prove otherwise. 1937 was also a quiet year in European diplomacy because Hitler had let go of initiative, but that would change dramatically in 1938.[464]

[464] Jonathan Wright and Paul Stafford, 'Hitler, Britain and the Hossbach Memorandum', *Militaergeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 42, (December 1987), 77 – 123.

Chapter Five: *1938 – the year of the Jackal*[465]

Historians of Poland's interbellum acknowledge that the country's war with Bolshevik Russia is essential to understanding the October 1938 occupation of Czechoslovak Teschen Silesia.[466] If one were an extreme 'determinist' a plausible argument could be made that the key to poor relations could be found even further back, in the 17th century Battle of White Mountain and the 18th century partitions of Poland. As the readers will see in the later part of this chapter, this author agrees that the perceived Czech sabotage and use of Poland's embattlement with invading Bolshevik forces to extract territorial concessions in 1920 were factors in Warsaw's decision to march troops into Teschen. Anti-Czech sentiment helped to justify the action but was not the sole rationale behind it. Moreover, far from being an example of rare, and in this case particularly ill timed, unity in the Polish ruling class, Czechoslovakia was in fact, a rather (un-) lucky coincidence.

Once the tension over Danzig abated in the aftermath of Polish and German declarations on minority rights, the last two months of 1937 passed relatively peacefully. But this quiet winter was background to a flurry of General Staff activity.

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[465] Winston Churchill likened the Polish action in Czechoslovakia to a jackal picking on carrion: see Waldemar Kowalski's interview with Marek Kornat for the *Polish Press Agency*, 4 Nov. 2012. http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/prof-marek-kornat-sojusz-z-hitlerem-uczynilby-z-polski-kolonie-niemiec (last accessed on 15 November 2014).

[466] See for example Jerzy Wiechowski, *Spor o Zaolzie* [*The quarrel over Zaolzie*] (Warszawa, 1990), Henryk Batowski, *Kryzys dyplomatyczny w Europie. Jesien 1938 – Wiosna 1939* [*The diplomatic crisis in Europe, Autumn 1938 – Spring 1939*] (Warszawa 1962) or Jerzy Pozenski, *Czechoslowacja w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1932-1938* [*The question of Czechoslovakia in Polish foreign policy between 1932-1936*] (Poznan, 1964); Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933 – 1939*, (Oxford, 2011), 587; Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World*, (London, 2002), 251. For brief an English language review of Polish-Czech relations, see: Zygmunt J. Gasiorowski, 'Polish-Czechoslovak Relations' 1918-1922', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 35 (84), (1956), 172 -193.

Polish military strategists assessed German capability, concluded that it was unlikely to start a war before 1942-45, and identified the north (Pomerania and East Prussia) as the direction from which a possible attack could come. The Poles' belief that the Third Reich was still too weak to start a war meant that the work on the defensive plan Wschod (East) was to continue unhindered. Of course, the strategists grossly underestimated the speed of German rearmament and the impact of the arms race on German decision-making.[467] Worse still, as we will see later in this chapter, the top brass allowed their nationalist sentiment to cloud their judgment during the Czechoslovak crisis, leading to a further strategic weakening of Poland's strategic position. However, before these events took place in the autumn, Jozef Beck scored a diplomatic coup and Poland unexpectedly improved her strategic position.

Despite his distrust of public opinion, which he characterised as 'impulsive', 'emotional' and 'ignorant of political reality', in the previous chapter we saw that, faced with the escalation of his conflict with Marshal Rydz-Smigly, Minister Beck engaged to a somewhat greater extent with the media and tried, for the first time, to explain some of his objectives to the Polish society.[468] This did not prove a lasting change. Beck remained a firm believer that 'good policy is the best propaganda', and

[467] In this aspect, the Poles were a polar opposite of their main ally, France. Peter Jackson argues that the French intelligence grossly overestimated the speed of German rearmament. Nevertheless, the Poles were not alone in their misjudgments. Different perceptions of Nazi military might among Britain's soldiers and civil servants are woven into the narrative of Joe Maiolo's monograph *Cry Havoc*. Joseph Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: How the Arms Race Drover the World to War, 1931-1941*, (New York, 2011). And neither the under- nor the overestimates fully grasped the degree of interdependence between German economic output (including that of the arms' industry) and Hitler's decision-making. As argued by Adam Tooze, the material needs of German manufactures were central in the Fuhrer's drive to expand eastwards. Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, (London, 2006), 99 - 134.

[468] Pawel Starzenski, *Trzy lata z Beckiem* [*Three years with Beck*], (Warszwa, 1991), 59.

never emulated Rydz-Smigly, who actively sought personal popularity and engagement with the public.[469]

As we know from previous chapters, the Minister's policy at best baffled and at worst angered the staunchly anti-German Polish public. However, on the rare occasions that Beck's goals coincided with public's sentiments, the Minister proved adept at riding the wave of support to win popular backing for his policies. The Polish-Lithuanian crisis of March 1938 is an excellent illustration of this approach. The autumn Polish-Czechoslovak crisis is not, and the reasons why will be explained later in this chapter.

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To Kaunas!

Late in the evening on 10 March 1938, just as Germany readied itself for the Anschluss with Austria, two Border Protection Corps (KOP) officers, Stanislaw Wolanin and Stanislaw Serafin, stationed on the outskirts of a small village of Wierszeradowka on the Polish-Lithuanian border prepared themselves for a patrol of a patch of deep forest in the checkpoint-less border-zone. Poland and Lithuania did not maintain diplomatic relations following the Polish annexation of the Vilnius region in the aftermath of 1920 General Lucjan Zeligowski's 'mutiny'. Ostensibly an

[469] Beck's natural dislike for publicity was doubtless influenced by Pilsudski. Not only was Pilsudski famously secretive, he also supposedly foresaw the increased difficulties the Minister would face from the public after the Marshal's death. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 27 and 59.

act of willful insubordination by a senior Pilsudskite officer, it was in fact sanctioned by the Marshal himself.[470]

The particular stretch patrolled by Wolanin and Serafin had previously proved popular with smugglers and spies, and that night they ran into a man trying to cross illegally into Lithuania.[471] The guards fired in an attempt at apprehending the runaway but, surprisingly, their Lithuanian counterparts responded in kind. One of the KOP officers, Stanislaw Serafin, was severely wounded, seized by the Lithuanians and later died of his injuries.[472]

The Polish-Lithuanian border had, by then, been 'dead' for nearly eighteen years and though similar incidents had occurred before, this one earned an unusually strong reply.[473] The diplomatic communiqué which was edited by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jan Szembek, who was filling in for Beck as the Minister vacationed in Italy, accused Kaunas of a deliberate attack on a serving Polish soldier and sent ripples through an already edgy Europe.[474]

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[470] Piotr Lossowski, *Konflikt polsko-litewski 1918-1920* [*The Polish-Lithuanian conflict 1918-1920*], (Warszawa, 1995), 161-166.

[471] According to the Polish authorities the man, who was later captured, was a Lithuanian agent intending 'to carry out subversive actions on Polish territory.' Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 18 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1387159, FO 417/38.

[472] Polish Telegraph Agency communiqué from 13 March 1938, reprinted in Howard Kennard, British Ambassador to Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 14 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1332159, FO 417/38.

[473] Reprinted in Howard Kennard, British Ambassador to Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 14 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1332159, FO 417/38.

[474] By mid-March 1938, Europe was already rocked by the sudden changes to the German leadership (including the replacement of Foreign Minister von Neurath with von Ribbentrop) and the possibility of an Anschluss. Thus, the Western Powers found Polish veiled threats of violence extremely disconcerting. See for example, Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, to Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, 15 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1290159, FO 417/38.

The timing was, indeed, unfortunate. In fact, Beck learnt of the skirmish from the same cable from which he found out about the Anschluss.[475] But the firm response was long coming. Already in November 1937, Minister Beck warned the British Ambassador Howard Kennard that another serious border incident would make the Poles take matters into their own hands.[476] Moreover, the Lithuanians' abrupt breaking-off of promising negotiations just a few weeks earlier, in February 1938, highlighted the necessity to change strategy.[477]

Beck cut short his holiday and immediately returned to Warsaw which was buzzing with nationalistic frenzy.[478] The public, cheered on by the National Democrats and the OZN (who attempted to hijack the demonstrations to drum up support for Rydz-Smigly) demanded ‘resolution'. This, depending on one's interlocutor, could mean anything from a normalisation in relations to a military campaign.[479] As the Minister found out during an emergency session of the Committee for the Defence of the Republic, the attitudes of Poland's key decision makers mirrored those of the public. President Moscicki and his protégé Kwiatkowski proposed a gentle approach while Rydz-Smigly and Premier

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[475] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 76.

[476] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 23 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1519159, FO 417/38.

[477] According to Beck's secretary Pawel Starzenski, the Minister was disappointed and worried when Lithuania abruptly walked away from these secret, semi-official talks. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 76. Also mentioned in Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, report 18 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1387159, FO 417/38.

[478] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 18 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1387159, FO 417/38. Also, George Sakwa, 'The Polish Ultimatum to Lithuania in March 1938', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 55 (2), (1977), 213.

[479] *Robotnik*, the press organ of the Polish Socialist Party, called for the establishment of bilateral relations, the PSL tacitly agreed, patriotically inclined crowds called to Rydz-Smigly to lead them to Kaunas and the odd punter mused that the 'old Marshal' would have done without all the ceremony and 'been in Kaunas the day Hitler entered Vienna.' Howard Kennard British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 23 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1519159, FO 417/38.

Skladkowski favoured a swift military action. In the end, it fell to Beck to appease everyone.

The Minister had long considered the Lithuanian issue harmful and absurd. He also thought that he was honour bound to resolve it at the earliest opportunity.[480] Considering that all previous attempts at talks ended in stalemates, Beck agreed with Rydz-Smigly and Skladkowski that the time for gentleness has passed.[481] Indeed, before he left for Sorrento, the Minister discussed 'the unfinished business' of Lithuania with Jan Szembek and indicated that he would get back to the problem upon his return.[482] At the same time, however, Beck was aware that the Western Powers, especially Britain, would not look kindly at a forceful intervention in Lithuania.[483] Moreover, with the Anschluss still fresh on people's minds, comparisons with Hitler's intimidation of the Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg were unavoidable, and could create the impression that Poland had chosen to move into the German orbit. Indeed, the British Foreign Secretary Halifax had already wondered if Warsaw and Berlin had struck a deal and Lithuania was 'Colonel Beck's price for acquiescence in German action against Austria and Czechoslovakia'.[484]

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[480] Pilsudski died before he was able to resolve either of Poland's two outstanding border disputes and Beck felt these were left for him to deal with. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 53.

[481] According to Miroslaw Arciszewski, in October 1932, Pilsudski even considered bribing some Lithuanian officials to solve the problem. Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Foreign Minister of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A 11.49/Cz/3/1.

[482] Jozef Beck's *Wspomnienia* (Original Polish manuscript), 138, JPIoA, Kolekcja Jozefa Becka, 034/7.

[483] Earlier in this chapter, we have already mentioned that the Foreign Office worried about 'that the Polish Government will (…) aggravate the already critical situation in Europe by making this unimportant incident an excuse for an attempt to settle the Vilna question by force or threat of force.' Indeed, lord Halifax even instructed ambassador Kennard to seek from Beck assurances of Lithuanian inviolability. Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, to Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw,15 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1290159, FO 417/38.

[484] Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, to Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in

There was as we now know no such agreement or even tacit coordination. In fact, as readers will remember from previous chapters, Beck was extremely cautious and unwilling to take sides openly. Indeed, later in this thesis (see pages 205-207) we will see just how difficult it was to get him off the fence.

In short, if at all possible, a military intervention had to be avoided. To appease the bellicose Rydz-Smigly who might have hoped that a 'short victorious war' would cement his popularity, Beck ingeniously suggested an 'exploding' ultimatum to Kaunas.[485] The implicit threat of violence appealed to the public, which obviously hankered after a show of Polish strength. At the same time, Poland's restraint – its sole demand being the establishment of diplomatic relations – meant that Western capitals could do nothing but urge Lithuania to accept.[486]

Poland's modest ultimatum was communicated to the Lithuanians on 17 March, nearly a week after the border incident. Ambassador Kennard described the text as 'rather polite' but the Minister would later admit that 'he had been pressed (…) to make a further demand in the ultimatum of a much more serious nature, but had refused to do so'.[487] Discretion prevented Beck from divulging the source of pressure; he was after all speaking to a foreign representative. However, it is not unreasonable

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Warsaw,15 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1290159, FO 417/38.

485 This could explain why the participants of the two 200,000 strong marches organised by the OZN in Warsaw on 17 and 19 March cried for a Polish march on Kaunas and carried banners calling for an immediate invasion. Wlodzimierz Kalicki, '17 marca 1938. Wodzu prowadz na Kowno!' ['17 March 1938. Commander lead us on Kaunas!], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 Mar. 2010.

486 According to Sir Howard Kennard, not doing so would have been 'impolitic'. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 18 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1373159, FO 417/38; Similarly, the British Charge d'affaires in Lithuania, Thomas Preston, agreed that there was a consensus among Western Powers (including the US) that the Polish demands were fair. Thomas Preston, British Charge d'Affaires in Kaunas, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London,1 Apr. 1938, TNA, N 180244659, FO 417/38.

487 Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 18 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1387159, FO 417/38.

to assume that the advocates of a forceful action (Marshal Rydz-Smigly, Premier Skladkowski and possibly the OZN) would also want greater Lithuanian concessions.[488] That Beck bartered with Rydz-Smigly looks even more plausible when we consider the relatively short time – two weeks – allowed for Kaunas' decision and substantial troop movements into the Vilnius region which culminated with Rydz-Smigly's triumphant arrival in the city on 18 March, barely 24 hours after the ultimatum was issued. Lithuania yielded soon after, on 19 March. The public was jubilant. A large victory parade complete with an air display and attended by Edward Rydz-Smigly took place in Vilnius on 20 March.[489] And all over Poland crowds gathered to cheer the second Marshal who was credited with bringing down 'the artificial wall of hatred which had for twenty years divided [Poland from] neighbouring Lithuania' and 'making Marshal Pilsudski's dream a reality'.[490]

Meanwhile, in the shadows, Jozef Beck also enjoyed a moment of triumph. Not only did his action bring him one step closer to realising his plan of creating a buffer zone between Germany and the Soviet Union; better still, the Lithuanian 'success' temporarily deflected the criticism layered on his policy by the OZN, the Opposition and the public. This was important because, if we believe Michal Lubienski, the

[488] According to Kennard, the gossip in Warsaw said that Beck and Rydz-Smigly clashed over the ultimatum. However, conflicting information made it impossible to discern who was mitigating whom. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 23 Mar. 1938, TNA, N 1519159, FO 417/38.

[489] *Glos Poranny*, 'Wilno uroczyscie witalo wojsko powracajace z nad granicy litewskiej, po zlikwidowaniu zatargu' ['In the aftermath of the skirmish, Vilnius gave a festive welcome to the troops returning from the Lithuanian border'], 21 March 1938, No. 79, 3.

[490] Ibid, 3

Minister had by then became convinced that he had to defend his office through occasional populist interventions.[491]

Better still, he managed to fulfill Pilsudski's wish on the late Marshal's name day.[492] According to, his Chef de Cabinet, Beck was 'touchingly happy' that he was able to 'gift' Lithuania to his dead Commandant, whom he imagined sitting in Heaven smiling with delight.[493]

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However, neither Rydz-Smigly nor Beck remained jubilant or on good terms for very long. By late June news of new conflicts in Warsaw alarmed the envoy in Belgrade, Roman Kazimierz Debicki, who mentioned in a semi-private letter to Jan Szembek 'your brief analysis of the politics at home have left me worried. Now, more than ever we need unity and to maintain the current, the only possible, course in our foreign policy'.[494] The author was unable to locate Szembek's original letter. Nevertheless, other documents from the period suggest that Beck's policy once again run afoul of the army. This time over Czechoslovakia.

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[491] Lubienski goes on to say that this attitude could have made Beck more reckless in the final years of his ministership. Michal Lubienski's Memoir, 12, JPIoA *Archiwum Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

[492] Pilsudski's name day which fell on 19 March – St Joseph's day – was always lavishly celebrated during the Marshal's life. Detailed descriptions of the festivities can be found in Aleksandra Pilsudska, *Wspomnienia* [*Memoirs*], (London, 1985); Mieczyslaw Lepecki, P*amietnik adjutanta Marszalka Pilsudskiego* [*The Diary of Marshal Pilsudski's adjutant*], (Warszawa, 1987); Jozef Kordian Zamorski, *Dzienniki (1930-1938)* [*Diaries (1930-1938)*], (Warszawa 2011).

[493] Michal Lubienski's note 'W zwiazku z wyciagiem zrobionym przez Pobog-Malinowskiego' ['With regards to Pobog-Malinowski's excerpt'], Brussels, 3 Aug. 1947, JPIoA *Archiwum Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

[494] Roman Kazimierz Debicki, Polish Envoy in Belgrade, to Jan Szembek, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 23 Jun. 1938, PISM, A.12.49/6II.

Although the two countries acknowledged each other's existence and exchanged emissaries, the Polish-Czechoslovak relations had been generally poor throughout the inter-war period.[495] The origins of this animosity lay with the events surrounding the 1920 Spa Conference.[496] Held to address German delays in fulfilling the terms of the Versailles Treaty, it was attended by the then Polish Prime Minister Wladyslaw Grabski who wanted to appeal to the Entente powers for material aid and to press for peace with Bolshevik Russia. The Allies agreed but their price was the settlement of Poland's outstanding border disputes such as the Teschen Silesia.[497] Russian forces were advancing towards Warsaw, so Grabski had no choice but to agree to Czechoslovak demands however disadvantageous they were to Poland.[498] Some of the more industrialised parts of Teschen Silesia, inhabited by over a hundred thousand ethnic Poles were lost.[499] The Czech exploitation of Poland's embattlement by the Red Army left a sour taste in Warsaw and the fate of the Polish minority in

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[495] Damian S. Wandycz, father of the prominent Polish-American historian Piotr S. Wandycz, provided an eyewitness account of how the relationship between Poland and Czechoslovakia was being forged immediately after the two countries regained independence. In an article in *The Polish Review*, Wandycz described a failed attempt by Pilsudski to 'develop an understanding' with the Czechs in winter 1918. A delegation led by Stanislaw Gutowski met with President Masaryk and delivered him a personal letter form Pilsudski. However, the Marshal's initiative was blocked by the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Karel Kramar. Damian S. Wandycz, 'A forgotten letter of Pilsudski to Masaryk', *The Polish Review*, Vol. 9 (4), (1964), 38-54.

[496] For an overview of the Polish involvement in the Spa Conference and the subsequent creation of the Inter-Allied Military Mission to Poland, see Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and Her Eastern Allies. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*, (Princeton, 1962), 151-160; Mieczyslaw B. Biskupski, 'Paderewski, Polish Politics and the Battle of Warsaw, 1920', *Slavic Review*, 46 (3), (1987), 503-512; F. Russel Bryant, 'Lord D'Abernon, the Anglo-French Mission and the Battle of Warsaw, 1920', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 38 (4), (1990), 526-547; Norman Davies, 'Sir Maurice Hankey and the Inter-Allied Mission to Poland, July-August 1920', *The Historical Journal*, 15 (3), (1972), 553-561.

[497] Other names of the region: Zaolzie and the Trans-Olza region will be used interchangeably in this text.

[498] Lifting of the transit blockade on military aid transports to Poland was contingent on Poland's acquiescence to the border deal. Although in reality the ban was not lifted until after the Battle of the Vistula. Michael Jabara Carley, 'Anti-Bolshevism in French Foreign Policy: The Crisis in Poland in 1920', *The International History Review*, 2 (3), (1980), 414-416.

[499] MacMillan, *The Peacemakers*, 250-251.

Silesia provided a source of constant friction between the two countries.[500] Thus, it was not unusual to hear Czechoslovakia referred to as the 'bastard child of Versailles' or more politely 'an artificial body […] disregarding the reality of rights and needs of [other] Eastern European nations' in Warsaw's corridors of power.[501]

Polish-Czechoslovak tension over Teschen Silesia peaked in September 1938 and will be discussed in a later part of this chapter. However, the course of that crisis was be influenced by an important development that occurred in the spring, namely the radicalisation of the military's attitude towards Prague. The British Military Attaché, Colonel John Talbot Godfrey, first observed it during a conversation with the Head of the Second Bureau of the Polish Ministry of Military Affairs:

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[500] In a conversation with Minister von Neurath, Beck complained that 'Despite their liberal constitution, the Czechs treat their minorities like the harshest police state would.' Minutes from a meeting between Jozef Beck, Poland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Konstantin von Neurath, Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs, 18 Jan.1938, PISM, A.12.59/6II.
One of the areas where this manifested more clearly was the labour market. Ethnic Poles who were active in national organisations or enrolled their children into Polish schools were often made redundant and replaced by Czechs brought in from other regions. Documents gathered for the 'Zaolzie 1938. Dokumenty-relacje-opinie' ['Zaolzie 1939. Documents – Accounts - Opinions'] exhibition organised by Ksiaznica Cieszynska, 2 October 2003 – 24 January 2004.
Naturally, Teschen Silesia was only one of many regions with substantial foreign minority. According to the 1931 census, just over 30% of Poland's citizens considered themselves of a non-Polish ethnicity. Henryk Zielinski, *Historia Polski 1914-1939* [*Polish History 1914-1939*], (Wroclaw, 1985), 124. Which meant that Warsaw found itself just as frequently having to intervene in defence of Poles abroad as being berated for mistreatment of its own minorities. For more on the Polish Minorities Treaty (revoked by Warsaw in 1934) and an overview of the European minority problem, see Mark Mazower, 'Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe', *Daedalus*, 126 (2), (1997), 47-63. For an overview of the role of the League of Nations in the international framework of minority rights protection (including case studies) see, Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations: Review Essay', *American Historical Review*, 112 (4), (2007), 1091-1117, Carole Fink, 'The League of Nations and the Minorities Question', *World Affairs*, 157 (4), (1995), 197-205. Contemporaneous perspectives on minority issues can be found in Joseph S. Roucek, 'The Problem of Minorities and the League of Nations', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 15 (1), (1933), 67-76 and Helmer Rosting, 'Protection of Minorities by the League of Nations', *The American Journal of International Law*, 17 (4), (1923), 641-660.

[501] Beck's instruction for Ambassador Lipski before the latter's meeting with Hitler. Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, 19 Sept. 1938, PSIM, A.11.49/N/7.

> (...) It seems clear from this and from other indications which have reached me that military circles in Poland would, on the whole, welcome the establishment of a common frontier between Poland and Hungary which would, they think, strengthen the resistance of the States between Germany and Russia and would have the additional advantage of eliminating the danger for Poland of possible Russian military influence in Czechoslovakia. In my opinion, such a view goes considerably further than the official policy of the Polish Government.[502]

A conversation with the Chief of the General Staff, Waclaw Stachiewicz, some two weeks later reinforced Godfrey's suspicions that the Polish military started to harbor aggressive intentions against Czechoslovakia.[503] Soon, it became clear that the impulse for the about-turn came from the very top. After meeting Edward Smigly-Rydz-Smigly, the French Ambassador Noel was distressed to find out that 'the Marshal referred to Czechoslovakia in a very different tone than during his 1936 visit to Paris'.[504] Indeed, the French might have even considered withholding the next tranche of the Rambouillet loan because of this.[505]

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[502] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 19 Apr. 1938, TNA, C 3348247055, FO 417/38.

[503] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 5 May 1938, TNA, C 397247055, FO 417/38.

[504] Noel's words as recounted to Ambassador Juliusz Lukasiewicz by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Georges Bonnet. Juliusz Lukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 18 Jun. 1938, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/1.

[505] In a conversation Howard Kennard, Ambassador Leon Noel remarked that if Poland does not provide "suitable reassurances towards Czechoslovakia he will recommend to his government that they should make use of the Rambouillet for French Military Credits to Poland to bring pressure to bear." Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to William Strang, Head of the Central Department in the Foreign Office in London, 3 May 1939. TNA, C3919268855, FO 371/21809.

It is possible that one of the reasons behind this change was increased fear of Soviet Russia. During both the Anschluss and the Polish-Lithuanian crisis, Moscow limited its response to words – communiqués, stern warnings, and even press articles.[506] But when in early spring 1938 it became increasingly clear that Hitler's next target would be its ally Czechoslovakia, a military intervention by the Soviet Union that may, or may not have, become a vehicle for occupying Czechoslovakia's neighbours looked more realistic.[507]

By then, the strategic work on the defensive plan 'Wschod' (East) was drawing to a close and suddenly all the threats the Polish planners had long worried about – the security of the Caucasian border or the presence of the Soviet Air Force at modern Czechoslovak airports – became more real.[508] Thus, as crude anti-Czech propaganda appeared in the Armed Forces' daily *Polska Zbrojna* and Polish officers started 'longing for an opportunity to have a go at the Czechs and get back Teschen Silesia'; the matter of establishing a common Polish-Hungarian border was raised with increased urgency.[509]

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[506] For example, the telling off of the Polish Ambassador Waclaw Grzybowski by Litvinov in the aftermath of the Polish ultimatum to Lithuania. Sakwa, 'The Polish Ultimatum', 223.

[507] Indeed, in September 1938, the Czechoslovak Representative in Moscow, Zdenek Fierlinger, warned President Benes that the Soviet Union could be looking to establish common border with Czechoslovakia by, possibly, seizing parts of Poland. Gerhard L. Weiberg, William R. Rock and Anna M. Cienciala, 'Essay and Reflection: The Munich Crisis Re-Visited', *The International History Review*, 11(4), (1989), 670.

[508] General Tadeusz Malinowski, to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 13 Feb. 1940. PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3. Romanian documents discovered since by Jiri Hochman disproved Malinowski's view, by proving Soviet leadership's unwillingness to send aid to Czechoslovakia through Romanian territory in September 1938. Jiri Hochman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938*, (New York, 1984), 194-201.

[509] Capitan T.A.H. Coltman, Officer at the War Office in London, to William Strang, Head of the Central Department in the Foreign Office in London. 14 Jun. 1938, TNA, C 379558555, FO 371/21806. For analysis of Warsaw's attempts to coordinate approach with Budapest see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting Wolrd War II, 1937-1939*, (Chicago, 1970), 401-402.

Beck was, of course, also no friend of the Czechs. Not only did he remember the 'beastly way' they behaved during the Polish Bolshevik war, he also saw Prague as an obstacle that 'got in the way of his policy' and had a personal dislike for Benes whom he thought 'small' and 'a know-it-all'.[510] The authorities in Prague were, quite correctly,[511] convinced that no rapprochement was possible for as long as he remained Foreign Minister.[512] Yet an April 1938 'fact-finding' mission to Warsaw showed the Czechs that Beck's policy line of acknowledging the Polish right to Zaolzie without using inflammatory language and making aggressive gestures was widely popular with the public.[513] Indeed, one of the leaders of the Peasant movement, Maciej Rataj was even reported as saying that '[were he] to become Foreign Minister today, [he] would not really be able to act differently from Beck' towards Czechoslovakia.[514]

[510] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 52-53.

[511] After a Slovak, Milan Hodza become Czechoslovak Prime Minister in 1935 some in the Polish Foreign Ministry looked at ways of improving relations between Warsaw and Prague. However, when Lubienski showed Beck his draft analysis he was told "But, my dear, we don't really want to improve our relations with the Czechs." The Chef the Cabinet interpreted this to mean that the Minister saw Czechoslovakia as a convenient 'problem' shared with Berlin. Michal Lubienski's Memoir, JPIoA *Archiwum Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.

[512] On 26 March 1938, the Czech representative in Warsaw, Juraj Slavik wrote: 'As long as there is no change of regime in Poland and as long as Beck directs Polish foreign policy, there is no hope for a Polish-Czechoslovak agreement (...)' quoted in Anna M. Cienciala, *Poland and the Western Powers 1938-1939: A Study in the Interdependence of Eastern and Western Europe*, (London-Toronto, 1968), 66.

[513] Aided by the ill disposed towards Beck ambassador Leon Noel, a Czechoslovak expert on Polish affairs, dr Vaclav Fiala, travelled to Poland and met with the leaders of the Opposition parties and persons close to general Sikorski. Anna M. Cienciala describes this visit in some detail. Cienciala, *A Study*, 66-68.

[514] Cienciala, *A Study*, 67.

Naturally, the fact that the Minister did not want to commit publicly to pursuing a border with friendly Hungary did not mean that he was averse to the idea.[515] In fact, it was quite the contrary. According to Pawel Starzenski, Beck saw the common border as a key element of Poland's defence 'embankment' and discussed its benefits with Miklos Horthy during the latter's visit in Poland in February 1938.[516] He did, however, want the flexibility to pursue this elusive goal at a convenient time, free from Western hostility or German scepticism.[517] Poland's territorial demands were something altogether different and, hence, were clearly defined from the beginning. In Beck's view they were constant and just. Warsaw wanted nothing more or less than the parts of Teschen Silesia inhabited by the Polish majority and which Marshal Pilsudski promised to bring back into the Motherland.[518] As we will see, this would cause another confrontation with Poland's second Marshal and the armed forces he commanded.

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When the first wave of Czechoslovak crisis swept through Europe in May 1938, Beck removed himself from Warsaw and went to Sweden. Some saw it as a smokescreen that ensured that 'he should not appear to be engrossed in the affairs of

[515] When asked if he endorses the army's position Beck categorically denied it and assured Ambassador Kennard that the Polish government harbours no aggressive intentions towards Czechoslovakia. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw. to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 4 May 1938, TNA, C 397247055, FO 417/38.

[516] Starzenski, *Trzy lata,* 83; also Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy*, vol. 2, 404-405.

[517] Clifford Norton attributed Beck's unwillingness to discuss a Polish-Hungarian border to Berlin not seeing 'these facile dreams (…) en coleur rose.' Clifford Norton, British Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Aug. 1938, TNA, C 8764267655, FO 417/38; interestingly, writing with hindsight, Zara Steiner argues that both Warsaw's and Budapest's territorial designs were carefully planned and choreographed by Berlin. Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 614-615.

[518] According to Beck, this solemn promise was made in Belvedere to a delegation of Polish Trans-Olzan activists at some point between 1926 and 1935. Despite efforts to do so, the author was unable to confirm the actual date. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 52-53.

Czechoslovakia.'[519] In reality the visit had long been planned and Beck, who was convinced nothing much would come of the Czech affair, decided not to cancel.[520] The Stockholm trip was first in what became the Minister's 'grand tour of the North' as he travelled to Tallinn in June, to Riga in July and to Oslo and Copenhagen in August. The common purpose of all the visits was to improve relations and, implicitly, Poland's strategic position.[521]

Beck returned to Warsaw on 4 August and had an almost immediate run in with Rydz-Smigly who, once again put the Minister down over his pro-German policy. The two men clashed over a German aircraft that attempted to fly over Polish airspace sometime in late July. 'Attempted' because as soon as it entered the Polish Corridor, an anti-aircraft battery fired shots and forced it to turn back. Later, intrusions onto the Polish sky became quite a common nuisance but in 1938 they were relatively rare so when the German government protested, Beck intervened on their behalf in good faith. According to accounts he 'asked Marshal Rydz-Smigly to give instructions to avoid possibility of a repetition'.[522] But if Beck the Minister hoped for understanding he did not get it. Instead, 'the Marshal is reported to have replied that, on the contrary, Polish commanders would have to answer to him if they did not carry out his instructions, which were to open fire in such cases'.[523] The

[519] Clifford Norton, British Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 24 Aug. 1938, TNA, C 8764267655, FO 417/38.
[520] According to Lubienski, Beck doubted the French and Soviet predictions that a German attack on Czechoslovakia was impending. Michal Lubienski's Memoir, JPIoA *Archiwum Jana Weinsteina*, Zes. 103/28.
[521] Beck saw the, broadly defined, Scandinavian countries as potential allies; elements of an effective buffer zone between Germany and the USSR. Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 76; Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 587.
[522] Clifford Norton, British Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 9 Aug. 1938. TNA, C 822526718, FO 417/38.
[523] Clifford Norton, British Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 9 Aug. 1938. TNA, C 822526718, FO 417/38.

censure might have been indirect, but the snub was very clear and aimed not just at the Foreign Minister but also the German leadership.

The proverbial knives were out once again and, in late August, Warsaw's society speculated that Beck's days at the Ministry were numbered. The source of the gossip was so credible that even other European Foreign Ministers excitedly and, no doubt, in 'greatest confidence' spoke about Marshal Rydz-Smigly's upcoming 'action', which would change Polish foreign policy.[524] As it happened, Poland did nearly loose its Foreign Minister on the eve of the Czechoslovak Crisis but the circumstances were somewhat different.

On 13 September 1938, just a day after Adolf Hitler publicly announced Germany's demand for the Sudetenland in Nuremberg, President Moscicki dismissed the Parliament and called and early election for November 1938. The action was directed against Beck's friend, the former Prime Minister, Walery Slawek who had, beating the official OZN candidate, just taken over as the Speaker of the Sejm following the death, in June, of the previous Speaker Stanislaw Car. As Speaker Slawek, would have held considerable influence over the selection of members of the Electoral Council the body responsible for selecting the new president. Slawek (see pages 124 – 125) was a vocal critic of both the new Marshal and his Camp of National Unity and there was a risk that he would upset Rydz-

[524] Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Petrescu-Comnen shared this intelligence with his Czech counterpart, Kamil Krofta, during the Entente Foreign Ministers' Conference in Bled in late August 1938. Krofta then recounted it to the British Ambassador to Prague Newton. Basil Newton, British Ambassador in Prague, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 25 Aug.1938, TNA, C 8843247055, FO 371/21809. More generally on Romanian-Soviet actions and reactions during the Crisis, see Hugh Ragsdale, *The Soviets, the Munich Crisis, and the Coming of World War II* (Cambridge, 2009).

Smigly's electoral chances.[525] A campaign launched by the OZN against Slawek immediately after the Parliament's dissolution ensured that he would not re-enter the Sejm.[526]

Moscicki's move seems to have been unexpected, at least in the Foreign Ministry. Beck, who obviously did not see it coming, reportedly found out about it from the radio and reacted with considerable anger.[527] On 13 September, days before Chamberlain's journey to Berchtesgaden, the Minister tended his resignation. In his letter to Moscicki, Beck implied that he had no choice but to quit: 'the fact that you, Mr President, issued directives which affect the country's external standing – at a time of extremely high international tension and without requesting my prior assessment of the situation – suggests lack of trust in your Foreign Affairs Minister.'[528] Reading between the lines, it is unlikely that the ruthless removal of Slawek did not weigh on the Minister's threat. After all, Slawek was also at the centre of events on the previous occasion that Beck attempted to give up his post.[529] This time too, the resignation was not accepted, and, after a long discussion with the President, Beck decided to withdraw it.[530]

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[525] Ignacy Moscicki's second term finished in 1940 and by 1938 Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly was openly groomed to replace him. Slawomir Koper, *Zycie prywatne elit II Rzeczpospolitej* [*The private life of the elites of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2005), 295.

[526] A number of other prominent 'Colonels', including two other former Prime Ministers Janusz Jedrzejewicz and Kazimierz Switalski, also failed to get in. Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne lata trzydzieste* [*The beautiful Thirties*], (Warszawa, 2008), 269.

[527] Kornat, *Polityka rownowagi,* 403.

[528] Letter of resignation, from Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, to Ignacy Moscicki, President of Poland, 13 Sept. 1938, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weisnteina* Zes. 103/34.

[529] We discussed these events in Chapter 3. See 110.

[530] Wladyslaw Pobog-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski* [*Poland's modern political history*], (London, 1963), Vol. 2, 853.

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The Jackal's feast[531]

Speaking on 14 October 1944to the ill-fated Polish Prime Minister in exile, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, Winston Churchill remarked that 'had Pilsudski lived, things would have taken a different turn. Although I did not have the opportunity to meet him, I have the greatest respect for his person and am convinced that if he [Pilsudski] had been alive, Beck would not have done what he did to the Czechs.'[532] Almost exactly six years previously Adolf Hitler also invoked the dead Marshal when talking about the Polish action in Teschen Silesia. He also never met Pilsudski but he believed that the Marshal would be very pleased with his 'good lads'' conduct during the Czechoslovak crisis.[533] Naturally, we cannot know how Marshal Pilsudski's foreign policy doctrine would have evolved had he lived past 1935 but in relation to his last known policy we can safely say they were both wrong. Churchill was wrong because Pilsudski disliked the Czechs deeply and was adamant that the Trans-Olza region should be returned to Poland. Hitler was wrong because the poor tactics and discord among the 'good lads' would have likely infuriated the old Marshal.

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[531] Winston Churchill likened the Polish action in Czechoslovakia to a jackal picking on carrion. Waldemar Kowalski, Interview with Marek Kornat, *Polish Press Agency*, 4 Nov. 2012, http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/prof-marek-kornat-sojusz-z-hitlerem-uczynilby-z-polski-kolonie-niemiec (last accessed on 15 November 2014).

[532] Note on a conversation between Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, Polish Prime Minister in Exile, and Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, about Soviet territorial claims and the reconstruction of the Polish government, 14 Oct. 1944. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina* Zes. 103/34.

[533] Joachim von Ribbentrop passed Hitler's approving comment ('Die Polen sind ganze Kerls. Pilsudski ware mit ihnen zufrieden gewesen') to Ambassador Lipski. Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Warsaw, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 24 Oct.1938, PISM A.11.49/N/7.

The Polish-Czechoslovak crisis has naturally attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and merited numerous monographs and many an article.[534] I will therefore provide only a brief overview of the main events and focus on those aspects that are relevant to the main focus of this thesis. Namely, the conflict between Minister Beck and Marshal Rydz-Smigly and its effect on the German threat perception.

Before he set off on his Baltic odyssey, Minister Beck managed to secure first Czechoslovak and later French promises that the Polish minority in Teschen Silesia should be extended the same concessions as any granted to the Sudeten Germans in the future. Thus, as the German pressure on Prague intensified once again in August 1938, Warsaw made demands to have a seat at the table at which any multilateral pact, including Germany and affecting Poland might be negotiated.[535] Therefore, when it was announced that the matter was to be resolved by a conference of the Four European Powers and without direct participation of Czechoslovakia, some Polish protest became inevitable. When it then emerged that Polish and Hungarian territorial claims would not be dealt with in Munich but in distant unspecified future, Beck – always wary of Poland's actual or perceived marginalisation – decided that he was left with little choice but to force Czechoslovakia to give up Teschen

[534] Recent Polish language examples include: Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Zaolzie: w polityce rzadu i opinii spoleczenstwa polskiego 1925-1937* [*Zaolzie: the government's policy and public opinion 1925-1937*], (Katowice, 2001); Jerzy Wiechowski, *Spor o Zaolzie* [*The quarrel over Zaolzie*], (Warszawa, 1990); Agnieszka Knyt (ed.), *Zaolzie: polsko-czeski spor o Slask Cieszynski 1918-2008* [*Zaolzie: the Polish-Czech conflict over Teschen Silesia 1918-2008*], (Warszawa, 2008).

[535] Juliusz Lukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, undated, PISM, A.11/Cz/3.

Silesia.[536] According to Minister Kwiatkowski, Beck saw Munich as a 'dangerous precedent' that could affect Poland's vital interests in the future. Thus, he argued,

> We must quickly and unequivocally oppose the use of these sort of methods in dealing with territorial conflicts (…) Poland's strong and determined stance on the matter could protect her from a future 'Munich'. Germany's [geographic] proximity should also spur Poland into taking an immediate action. There is a danger that, if we wait and dally, the Reich could annex this valuable, highly industrialised territory and our claim to the region would be ignored for many years to come. Czechoslovakia had agreed to treat our territorial demands as equal with German ones. If today the Western Powers approve of Prague's ceding the region inhabited by a German minority to the Reich then we must demand that our small but justified application be dealt with analogically.[537]

Another reason why Warsaw had so little room to maneuver was public pressure.[538] Repeated news of Czechoslovak mistreatment of the Polish minority in

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[536] Steiner believes that this was choreographed by Hitler to alienate his next victim. If so, the strategy proved successful in the short term. Western, and in particular British, public and politicians were outraged at Poland's unsporting behaviour. Miroslaw Arciszewski, Former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3; also Gerhard L. Weinberg, The foreign policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939, (London, 1980), 478; Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate 1918-1939*, (New York, 1982), 458-459.

[537] Michal J. Zacharias, 'Polityka zagraniczna Polski wobec zagrozenia ze strony Niemiec i Zwiazku Sowieckiego w okresie miedzywojennym' ['Polish Foreign Policy and the question of German and Soviet threat in the inter-war period]', in *Z dziejow polityki i dyplomacji Polskiej: Studia posiwecone pamieci Edwarda hr. Raczynskiego Prezydenta Rzeczpospolitej na wychodzstwie* [*Studies in Polish policy and diplomacy: In memoriam of Count Edward Raczynski*] edited by Henryk Bulhak, (Warszawa, 1994), 280.

[538] Howard Kennard's dispatch from 10 September provides an in-depth analysis of the public mood in Poland on the eve of the Czechoslovak crisis. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in

Teschen Silesia had kept the issue alive in the public's consciousness for the past twenty years but in late summer 1938 the anti-Czechoslovak agitation turned into frenzy. Like we saw earlier during the Lithuania crisis, here too, the OZN was instrumental in stoking the nationalist zeal. *Gazeta Polska* reported hundreds of 'spontaneous' protests during which whole factory crews, public institutions staff, teachers with schoolchildren and scout brigades marched against 'Czech imperialism'. These were often coordinated or addressed by local Camp of National Unity activists.[539] The largest demonstration took place on 22 September 1938 when 250,000 people (according to official figures) gathered in Warsaw. Their chant: 'Down with Czechoslovakia' was occasionally punctuated by shouts of 'Long live Rydz-Smigly ' which turned to 'Lead us against the Czechs' after the Marshal addressed the crowds from a balcony.[540] A few days later, on 27 September, Kazimierz Pape, the Polish envoy, would present the government in Prague with Warsaw's official demands.

There is a tendency in the historiography of the Polish-Czechoslovak crisis to present it as engineered by Minister Beck who won President Moscicki and Marshal Rydz-Smigly over to his view. However, when it comes to Rydz-Smigly, this assessment may be incorrect.[541] Indeed, this thesis argues that, both men cooperated over Zaolzie because it suited their individual agendas. Beck wanted Teschen Silesia

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Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 10 Sept, 1938, TNA, C9648530218, FO 417/38.

[539] Piotr Oseka, 'Wodzu prowadz na Czechy – Prasa polska w 1938' ['Lead us on the Czechs Commander – Polish Press in 1938'], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 Sept. 2008, 25.

[540] Ibid., 25.

[541] Beck had to battle over his plan to issue an ultimatum to Prague but his opponent was not Marshal Rydz-Smigly but Minister Kwiatkowski. Piotr Lossowski, (ed.), *Historia dyplomacji polskiej* [*The history of Polish diplomacy*], vol. 4, (Warszawa, 1995), 567-570.

to be returned to Poland and to prove to the Western Powers that Warsaw would stand by and be dictated to.[542] Rydz-Smigly, on the other hand, stood to benefit from a popular bloodless victory, and despite his 1936 Paris reassurances, the Marshal was not exactly sympathetic to Czechoslovakia.[543] Beck's insistence that Poland should not formally cooperate with Germany meant that Rydz-Smigly could not even chastise him for that. Indeed, both men agreed that in the event of a war, which Beck at least considered unlikely,[544] Poland would throw her lot with Britain and France.[545]

For a brief moment, there existed a working relationship between the military command and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Throughout the crisis, Beck and Rydz-Smigly remained in constant contact either personally or through the so-called 'directors' line' (a special phone line connecting the President, cabinet ministers and the Marshal).[546] The (in)famous map of Polish territorial interests which referred to Oderberg rail junction as Bogumin, and which was presented to the Germans by

[542] According to his manuscript, when the Munich agreement was published, Minister Beck told Moscicki and Rydz-Smigly that 'General Bartnowski must march into Zaolzie and against Munich.' Jozef Beck's Manuscript, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jozefa Becka,* Zes. 034/7.

[543] In a report on Rydz-Smigly 's 1936 visit to France, ambassador Lukaszewicz described a conversation on Czechoslovakia between the Marshal and Yvon Delbos. When the Frenchman asked about the state of Polish-Czechoslovak relations, Rydz-Smigly reminded him of the Czechs' behavior during the Polish-Bolshevik war and stated that while he was hostile to the country, her was not its friend either. Juliusz Lukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, to Jozef Beck, Foreign Minister in Warsaw, 7 Sept. 1936, PISM, *Kolekcja Edwarda Smiglego-Rydza*, Zes. 98/3.

[544] On the day of Hitler's speech at Nuremberg, 12 September, Beck reassured Ambassador Raczynski that his wife and children won't have to go down to the bomb shelter: 'Empty threats (…) they will sell Benes for two cents but they won't fight.' Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 91.

[545] See for example: Minutes from a conversation between Kazimierz Smagorzewski, *Gazeta Polska* Berlin Correspondent, and Edward Rydz-Smigly, General Inspector of the Armed Forces of Poland, 8 May 1939, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Edwarda Smiglego-Rydza*, Zes.98/18 and Jozef Beck's Manuscript, JPIoA *Kolekcja Jozefa Becka* Zes. 034/7.

[546] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 95.

Ambassador Lipski was drafted by the General Staff.[547] Finally, the decision to issue Prague with an ultimatum was agreed with the Marshal.[548] Polish demands were accepted. The following day, 1 October 1938, Rydz-Smigly ordered General Wladyslaw Bartnowski to oversee Czechoslovak withdrawal from the Trans-Olza region. The public was ecstatic and the press jubilant. Beck and Rydz-Smigly, who travelled, separately, to Zaolzie were both feted and, judging by contemporary photographs, extremely satisfied.

The easy collaboration ended even before the jubilant patriots celebrating in Teschen ran out of the Czech stocks of beer and sausages.[549] In the absence of a unifying goal, an erstwhile collaborator reverted back to being a usurper interfering with Beck's Slovak policy objectives.

As much as the Poles disliked the Czechs, whom, as Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Pilsudski's favourite, put it in 1938, they regarded as 'no longer a Slav nation but a mix, an amalgam of all races who cannot be relied on'; they felt a kinship with the predominantly Catholic Slovaks.[550] Indeed, in a conversation with Goering on 24 August 1938, Ambassador Lipski assured him that: 'Poland enjoys a particularly close relationship with Slovakia due to common race and language. The

[547] Oderberg/Bogumin was an important rail junction in the Central European rail network the only area claimed by both Poles and Germans. According to Beck, Marshal Pilsudski was particularly insistent that it goes to Poland. Jozef Beck's Manuscript, JPIoA, *Kolekcja Jozefa Becka* Zes. 034/7 Also, Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, 28 September 1938. PISM A.11.49/N/7 Initially given to Poland, Germany later claimed that she was misled by the use of alternative names. Miroslaw Arciszewski, Former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3.

[548] We aren't going to wait no three months. I have just spoken to [Rydz-] Smigly. We are sending the Czechs and ultimatum.' Beck quoted in Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 94.

[549] The stocks run out on 3 October 1938. Adam Kozuchowski, 'Monachijska pulapka', *Polityka*, 4 Nov. 2009.

[550] Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski quoted in Marian Romeyko, *Wspomnienia o Wieniawie i rzymskich czasach* [*Remembering Wieniawa and the Roman times*] (Londyn, 1969), 57.

ties are particularly close because we have no [political or territorial] quarrel with Slovakia. Their national awareness had grown enormously over the last few years and it is becoming imperative that she is granted an autonomous status either by the Czechs or the Hungarians'.[551] Once autonomous, the Poles assumed, Slovakia would become a natural ally;[552] or to quote colonel Wieniawa once more: 'she would walk into our arms'.[553]

The successful recovery of Teschen Silesia allowed Minister Beck to focus on the next item(s) on his security agenda, building partnership with Slovakia and, according to some sources, developing an Italo-Polish-Hungarian alliance.[554] The new Polish Ambassador to Rome, Beck's friend Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, was to find out whether an agreement could be brokered with Rome.[555] Budapest had also been approached.[556] On Slovakia, the Minister had already been in contact with the polonophile nationalist leader Karol Sidor whom he reassured that Poland had no interest in Slovak territory.[557] Beck was wrong. As it turned out, Marshal Rydz-Smigly did have an interest in Slovakia.

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[551] Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 24 Aug. 1938. PISM A.11.49/N/7.

[552] For a more detailed overview of Polish-Slovak relations see: Thaddeus V. Gromada, 'Pilsudski and the Slovak Autonomists', *Slavic Review*, 28 (3), (1969), 445-462; Thaddeus V. Gromada, 'The Slovaks and the failure of Beck's "Third Europe" scheme', *The Polish Review*, 14 (4), (1969), 55-64.

[553] Romeyko, *Wspomnienia*, 57.

[554] According to Feliks Frankowski, Warsaw and Budapest wanted to invite Bratislava to their alliance so the two objectives could be considered as one. Feliks Frankowski, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 16 Apr. 1941, PISM A.11.49/Cz/3/5.

[555] Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Polish Ambassador in Rome, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 20 Jun. 1938, PISM A.11.49/Cz/2; Also, Romeyko, *Wspomnienia*, 58.

[556] Marek Kornat, *Polityka Rownowagi. Polska miedzy Wschodem a Zachodem* [The Policy of Equilibrium: Poland, the East and the West] (Warszawa, 2007), 365.

[557] Starzenski, *Trzy lata* 98.

Although no one in the Polish General Staff reflected on the shortsightedness of aiding Germany dismantle Czechoslovakia, they decided that controlling a slither of Slovakia's mountainous territory including Jaworzyna and part of Spisz would significantly improve Poland's defensive position. When he found out about it, Beck vehemently opposed the idea. Most likely, he realised that by annexing a previously unclaimed territory with a Slovak majority Warsaw would create anti-Polish sentiment where there previously was none.[558] Numerous, undoubtedly heated, phone calls with Marshal Rydz-Smigly followed. Eventually and 'under extreme duress', the Minister grudgingly agreed to the principle of the Staff's demand but tried to limit its scope as much as possible.[559]

At least that is what Pawel Starzenski's laconic account tells us happened. However, a previously unknown letter from Bohdan Podoski to historian Piotr Wandycz suggests that the confrontation was a lot more dramatic.[560] Writing in 1975, Podoski claimed that the Minister was so unhappy with the military's conduct during the Polish-Czechoslovak crisis that he tendered in his second resignation in two months in November, and even briefly stopped attending Cabinet meetings. Podoski's letter, written nearly four decades after the crisis it alludes to, is the only account of Beck's supposed resignation, so we cannot determine if the events mentioned are described accurately. It is possible that, annoyed at Rydz-Smigly's interference, Beck made a point of missing several government meetings or even threatened to quit in an attempt to get the Marshal to back down. However, it is clear

[558] Zara Steiner believes that in addition to Warsaw's territorial claims, its support for Hungarian demands in Ruthenia also played a part in fomenting anti-Polish sentiment in Slovakia. Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 690.
[559] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 98.
[560] The letter's existence was revealed by Marek Kornat who also provided a detailed analysis of its content in his 2007 book. Kornat, *Polityka Rownowagi*, 405.

from the two other resignation attempts mentioned in this thesis so far, we saw that Beck had a strong sense of responsibility for his country and it does not seem likely that he would have abandoned his post just as Poland's international situation deteriorated rapidly.[561]

As punishment for its action in Zaolzie, Warsaw received a cold shoulder from both London and Paris. In Britain, Ambassador Edward Raczynski suddenly found it very difficult to re-establish relations with policy makers and parliamentarians. He was denied a meeting with Winston Churchill and it was only owing to his social connections that the count managed to arrange a conversation with Anthony Eden.[562] In Paris, the French Foreign Minister and a number of senior officers considered abandoning Poland as an ally.[563] In Berlin on the other hand, on 24 October 1938, Foreign Minister Ribbentrop approached Ambassador Lipski with a list of German territorial demands, chief among which was acquiescence to the construction of an extraterritorial highway and rail line that would connect East Prussia with mainland Germany.

Lipski did not report the development in the cable concerning his meeting with Ribbentrop, which instead included a handwritten note informing the Minister that part of the conversation would be relayed to him in Lipski's private letter.[564] The

[561] If Beck did, as suggested by Kornat, ask for to be relieved from his post, the diplomatic developments of late October 1938 would explain why he was once again dissuaded from leaving. Kornat, *Polityka Rownowagi*, 405.
[562] Edward Raczynski, *The British-Polish Alliance, its origin and meaning*, (London, 1948), 9.
[563] Waclaw Jedrzejewicz and Henryk Bulhak (ed.), *Dyplomata w Paryzu 1936-1939* [*A Diplomat in Paris 1936-1939*], (London, 1989), 187.
[564] Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 24 Oct. 1938, PISM, A.11.49/N/7.

letter could not be found but Beck's reply, marked as 'extremely secret', from 31 October 1938 is kept in London's Sikorski Archive.[565] It contains assurances that maintaining good Polish-German relations is very important to Warsaw and alludes to the possibility of strengthening and prolonging the 1934 Non-Aggression treaty. What is absent from the letter is any indication that Poland was willing to even consider German demands. But initially Poland, or at least its Foreign Minister, did. This can be inferred from two other documents available in London: a semi-private letter from Jozef Potocki to Jozef Lipski dated 27 November 1938 and an undated note about the practicalities of building an extraterritorial high-way through Pomerania.

It had generally been assumed that Minister Beck hid the existence of German demands from Marshal Rydz-Smigly and other policy-makers because he was unsure if the initiative had Hitler's approval.[566] Yet the two documents mentioned above suggest that he not only did not question the origin of the demands but initially at least thought them reasonable enough to engage with. In deep secrecy, a small team consisting of the Minister, Ambassador Lipski, the Head of the Ministry's Western Department Jozef Potocki and another senior diplomat Wladyslaw Kulski addressed the matter or extraterritorial passageways in considerable detail.[567] Indeed, the undated note, presumably prepared by or for this secret team, considers a range

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[565] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, 31 Oct. 1938, PISM, A.11.49/N/7.

[566] Marek Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec Paktu Ribbentrop-Molotow. Problem zblizenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczpospolitej* [*1939 Poland and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. The problem of Soviet-German rapprochement in the foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2002), 264-265.

[567] Jozef Potocki, Head of the Western Department in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, 27 Nov. 1938, PISM A.11.49/N/7.

of issues from whose legal and traffic code should be enforced on the highway through extradition, troop movements, and any necessary alterations to the Paris Convention, to maintenance, tolls and the number of exists.[568]

The official reason for this extreme secrecy was to keep the Germans on their toes during any future negotiations but the fact that neither the Staff nor the Communications Ministry had been consulted about the prospective route suggests the Foreign Ministry wanted to wait and present them the finished project for approval. Thus presumably minimising external interference in any future diplomatic negotiations.

In the previous chapter we saw that in post-Pilsudskite Poland, populist nationalist rhetoric increasingly appealed to much of the political and military leadership. This continued in 1938. Indeed, on previous pages I described the press's aggressive language and the exploitation of both the Polish-Lithuanian and the Polish-Czechoslovak crises. The Trans-Olzan success in particular gave the Poles, including a major part of the Sanacja political establishment, a false sense of strength and security that would have likely made the already questionable German proposal particularly unpalatable. We have also already established that Marshal Rydz-Smigly interfered in all aspects of Polish foreign policy. Indeed, readers will remember the vicious attack from the OZN press on Beck's plans to renegotiate the Danziger constitution. It is likely that if he, or his political advisers, found out that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs were looking into a possible deal with the Third Reich,

[568] Wladyslaw Kulski, Head of the Legal Department in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, undated, PISM A.11.49/N/7.

it would have been canned amid a media campaign of muscle flexing, posturing and provocative rhetoric of the kind we would see in the summer of 1939.

Beck's January 1939 conversation with Hitler would undermine the Minister's hope that Germany would not attempt to dominate Poland and would force him to finally disclose the Nazi territorial demands to Marshal Rydz-Smigly. That he relayed them to a foreign diplomat more than two weeks before informing his Commander in Chief is testament to the broken relationship between the men.[569] As it would turn out, this delay would cost Warsaw precious planning and preparation time; on top of her having already been weakened by poor strategy. And while the Western displeasure with Polish 'ultimatum diplomacy' would not prevent alliances from being forged in time for war, these 'bloodless victories' had a detrimental effect on the Polish public and military who became overconfident in their country's offensive capability. This would filter down to policy makers such as Economy Minister Kwiatkowski who would prove extremely reluctant to raise military spending and even Minister Beck who was kept ignorant about the actual state of the Polish armed forces.

This discrepancy between the real and imagined strength will be at the core of the following chapter, where we will examine its effect on intelligence analysis. This in turn affected Minister Beck's foreign policy formation and the perception of Poland's

[569] Beck told Ambassador Kennard about the demands. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 21 Dec.1938, TNA, C 1587219755, FO 417/38.

international situation by Marshal Rydz-Smigly, the political elite and swaths of the public – all with fatal consequences.

Chapter Six: *1939 – The race to war*

> Peace is a precious and a desirable thing. Our generation, bloodied in wars, certainly deserves peace. But peace, like almost all things of this world, has its price, a high but a measurable one. We in Poland do not know the concept of peace at any price. There is only one thing in the lives of men, nations and countries that is without price. That thing is honour.[570]

With those words, Poland's Foreign Minister, Jozef Beck, rebuffed German demands to cede her territory in Pomerania in his famous speech delivered to the Sejm on 5 May 1939. Reaction to his defiance was tumultuous and positive. The chamber gave him a standing ovation and congratulatory messages, from both Poland and abroad, soon began flooding the Foreign Ministry. However, though his popularity soared, Beck was far from euphoric.[571] According to his closest associates, in the days that followed the Minister appeared worn down by the recent events and even visibly distraught. One of his Deputies, Miroslaw Arciszewski, recalls that Beck's reaction to seeing the telegrams of support was to throw them hatefully to the other side of his large, sparsely decorated office.[572] A highly intelligent man, Beck

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[570] Józef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in an expose to the Sejm, 5 May 1939. Reprinted in Jozef Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki Jana Szembeka* [*Jan Szembek's Diary and Documents*] Vol.4, (London, 1972), 727-732.

[571] According to Beck's letter to his friend Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, there were plans to entrust him with the forming a new government. Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Polish Ambassador in Rome, 10 May 1939, Stanislaw Sierpowski, *Zrodla do historii powszechnej okresu miedzywojennego* [*Documents on modern history of the inter war period*], Vol. 3, (Poznan, 1992), 426.

[572] Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs or Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, Polish Institute and Sikorski

realised that his 5 May speech marked not only an end to his foreign policy based on bilateral agreements and détente with Germany but its complete failure.

That Poland might need to reassess her foreign policy objectives became clear by March 1939. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly given Warsaw's hostility to its southern neighbour, this realisation was not caused by German occupation of Prague. It was Berlin's forceful imposition of a 'Protectorate' over Slovakia, followed by rapid construction of fortifications in the Wag valley and the occupation of the Lithuanian Port of Klaipeda (Memel) that shook the Polish civilian, and especially the military, authorities.[573] This was when Beck had decided to pursue close cooperation with Great Britain and even, it is alleged, attempted to leave office once again.[574] But in the end he remained at the helm of the Foreign Ministry through the summer of 1939, the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the German attack, British and French entry into the war and finally the evacuation of the government to Podole and then Romania.

The Many Misjudgments of Minister Beck

In previous chapters, I traced the breakdown of the relationship between the occupants of the Bruehl Palace and Wierzbowa. Examining the events of 1939, this chapter will demonstrate how the dysfunctional relationship between Beck and Rydz-Smigly undermined the Poles' response to the immediate German threat and

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Museum (thereafter: PISM), A.11.49/Cz/3/1; According to Beck's secretary Starzenski, who questioned Arciszewski's accuracy, the Second Deputy Minister also said this to the German Ambassador, Hans von Moltke. Pawel Starzenski, *Trzy lata z Beckiem* [*Three years with Beck*], (London, 1972), 232.

573 Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs or Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1.

574 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 126.

prevented the Polish authorities from taking advantage of opportunities which presented themselves and that could possibly have improved Poland's defensive position in September 1939. Furthermore, the empire building that had previously characterised the interaction between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces had spread to other institutions such as the Treasury and the General Staff. As we shall see, each of these players pursued their own individual, usually conflicting, agendas in a fashion that often harmed Poland's interests on the eve of the outbreak of war.

While the 5 May speech was a watershed, marking a radical change of Polish-German relations, it was also a culmination of a process of deterioration that had begun seven months earlier. While Minister Beck seethed over the snub of being excluded from the Munich Conference, Polish public opinion believed the country had achieved an important international victory. However, instead of demonstrating strength, decisiveness and military might, the Polish occupation of Tscheshen Silesia aggrieved the western great powers and seemed to place Poland firmly in the German-sphere of influence.[575] It compromised Poland's reputation and, while the French and British press overflowed with criticism of Poland, Berlin felt ready to extract a firm commitment from Warsaw.[576] This was a crucial moment in the coming of the Second World War, because, as we saw in the previous chapter, immediately after Munich the German leadership had found itself unsure [about]

[575] Edward Raczynski, former Polish Ambassador in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 21 Apr. 1941, PISM, A.11/49/Cz/3/19.

[576] Juliusz Lukaszewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 1 Feb. 1939, PISM, A.12/49/6; Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History 1933 – 1939*, (Oxford, 2011), 614-615.

how to proceed. If Berlin turned East, it would have almost certainly antagonised Poland but if it set its sights on France, it needed Warsaw's help, or at least acquiescence to secure its rear.

Germany had previously floated the idea of joining the Anti-Commintern pact to the Poles but they were unwilling to do so.[577] Thus, a decision was made in Berlin to heighten the pressure. On 24 October 1938, the Polish Ambassador to Berlin, Jozef Lipski, was invited to lunch at the Grand Hotel in Berchtesgaden by Joachim von Ribbentrop. There, the German Foreign Minister put forward, for the first time, the idea of *Gesamtlösung* – a final settlement of ongoing Polish-German issues. In exchange for allowing the construction of an extraterritorial rail and road connection, and agreeing to Danzig's reconnection with mainland Germany, Poland would get a guarantee of her western border and a 25-year extension of the 1934 Non-Aggression Pact.[578]

Lipski, clearly taken aback by the German proposal, promptly informed Ribbentrop that Polish agreement was extremely unlikely.[579] He then proceeded to exclude the German demands from the report he drafted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following day and recounted the matter in a personal letter to Beck instead.[580] Beck's deputy Szembek became the third, and last, person privy to the

[577] Gerhard L. Weinberg, 'German Foreign Policy and Poland, 1937-1938', *The Polish Review*, (1975), 20(1), 14.
[578] Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and its Fate 1918-1939*, (New York, 1982), 458-459; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The foreign policy of Hitler's Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939*, (London, 1980), 478.
[579] Waclaw Jedrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Berlin: Papers and Memoirs of Jozef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland* (New York, 1968), 445.
[580] Jedrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Berlin*, 458. The letter itself is missing.

matter when Lipski confided in him on 29 October.[581] A polite refusal was drafted and delivered to Ribbentrop on 19 November and the issue appeared settled. Indeed, Ribbentrop even confirmed Beck and Lipski's speculation that the initiative was his and his alone and the Polish-German relationship seemingly continued as before.[582] Indeed, during a conversation with Szembek on 3 January 1939, Ambassador Lipski expected another German attempt to attract Poland to join the Anti-Comintern pact and perhaps a timid mention of the motorway.[583] Asked whether the Polish refusal to cooperate might result in an armed conflict, Lipski conveyed the Polish military propaganda in remarking that while theoretically possible, a German-Polish war would be too expensive for Berlin to consider it.[584]

Unfortunately, as Jozef Beck was to discover three days later, when he visited Hitler in his Berchtesgaden retreat on the way back from the French Riviera (where he unsuccessfully tried to meet with Bonnett), Ribbentrop had not acted alone and the matter was far from forgotten. After reassuring the Polish Minister that a strong Poland was a strategic necessity for Germany and alluding to future collaboration between both countries against Soviet Russia, Hitler turned to Danzig.[585] Much to Beck's displeasure, the Fuhrer stated that Danzig was a German city and that it would, undoubtedly, return to the Reich.[586] The Polish Minister must have stiffened upon hearing this and Hitler reportedly returned to a more conciliatory tone. Promising to respect Poland's economic interests in the city. Beck, responded with

[581] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 334.
[582] Jedrzejewicz (ed.), *Diplomat in Berlin*, 467.
[583] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 458.
[584] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 458.
[585] Note from the meeting between, Jan Szembek, Deputy Foreign Minister in Warsaw, and Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, 8 Jan. 1939, PISM, A.11/49/N/8.
[586] Ibid.

what he thought a firm but polite refusal. This turned out to be Beck's second great misjudgment. For one thing, as pointed out by Miroslaw Arciszewski, Beck's firmness was lost on the Fuhrer who 'took [the accompanying pleasantries] to mean that Poland would eventually yield'.[587] Worse still, Hitler's perceived backing down convinced the Minister that 'firmness and strong nerves [were] they key to successfully dealing with the Germans, because Germany [had] nothing to gain by attacking Poland.'[588] He reportedly clung to this belief until August 1939 and inculcated it in his department and with President Moscicki.[589]

And yet, according to his Chief of Staff, Michal Lubienski, Beck left Berchtesgaden angry and determined to revitalise Polish relations with the western great powers.[590] Indeed, when, three days later, Szembek mentioned to him that he planned to make a short, private trip to London, the Minister implied that he wanted him to speak to 'a few Englishmen' about closer cooperation.[591] What is more, the Foreign Minister finally informed Marshal Rydz-Smigly and the President of German pressure. Thus, on 8 January, unbeknownst to anyone but the participants, five members of the National Security Council (Moscicki, Marshal Rydz-Smigly, Prime Minister Skladkowski and ministers Kwiatkowski and Beck) gathered in Warsaw's Royal Castle to assess the seriousness of German demands and the impact

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[587] Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1; Also, Taduesz Szumowski, Head of the Western Department of the Polish Military Intelligence Service (Oddzial II), in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, PISM, B I.6g/7/379a.

[588] Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1.

[589] Ibid.

[590] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 465.

[591] Ibid., 468.

they could have on Polish security.[592] This secret meeting proved to be the first occasion when the possibility of a war with Germany was acknowledged and considered by the Polish authorities. Determined not to repeat the sad fate of Czechoslovakia or loose Poland's hard-won independence, the attendees agreed that continuing German persistence on issues of secondary importance like the extraterritorial highway could signal a more serious shift in the relationship between Berlin and Warsaw. A decision was taken to reject all German proposals and, if the détente had really come to an end, fight.[593] At first one might think that this meeting marked a pivotal shift in Poland's war preparations but in reality, little changed. True, shortly after the 8 January meeting, Rydz-Smigly seemed to take an even greater interest in German matters. Indeed, demonstrating how little he understood the Minister, he even attempted bypassing Beck in his quest for information and tried to tease news out of Szembek.[594] But there was no rush of planning activity in the General Staff whose Chief appeared more concerned with helping the Hungarians throttle unrest in the First Vienna Award Territories (Munkatsch).[595] Minister Kwiatkowski did not increase the military budget. Neither was there a change in Polish foreign policy.

Perhaps Beck's anger at the Germans receded quickly and he concluded that he was not ready to forfeit the 1934 Agreement and thus admit that he had been wrong. Or, perhaps, Rydz-Smigly's heightened interest in Polish-German relations, once

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[592] Romulad Szeremietiew, *Czy Moglismy Przetrwac: Polska a Niemcy w Latach 1918-1939*, [*Could we have survived: Polish - German relations between 1918 and 1939*], (Warszawa, 1994), 305.
[593] Ibid., 306.
[594] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 472.
[595] Ibid., 462.

again made the Minister afraid of losing control over his domain. Whatever his reasons, Beck backtracked. Two days after the Castle meeting, Beck issued a communiqué to all diplomatic posts that appears to confirm Arciszewski's view of him as 'the Optimist'. Drafted in the Minister's trademark style it read that:

> The talks in Berchtesgaden and Munich proved useful in determining Berlin's policy-line after the Czech crisis. Germany reaffirmed its intent to maintain good-neighbourly relations with Poland.
>
> I affirm that allegations of Hitler's new direction in Eastern Europe are an exaggeration. (…) German eastern policy remains extremely anti-Russian. Colonial pursuits are at the centre of Hitler's attention.[596]

Indeed, Beck's attempt to conceal any problems in Polish-German relations was so successful that the few weeks that followed saw a number of diplomatic reports whose authors clearly attempted to 'toe the Minister's line' and showed blatant pro-German bias. Ambassador Jozef Potocki from Washington is one example of such a 'Yes-Man'. In his two reports from 12 and 16 January 1939, Potocki condemned the 'anti-Nazi psychosis that, incited by the 'Jewish International' and refugees from Germany and Czechoslovakia, resulted in a false view that European peace is hanging by last threads and that war is inevitable.'[597] In a thoroughly flawed assessment of the situation, which mirrored German assessments of American policy making, he went as far as to claim, that while Roosevelt thought that heightened American interest in international affairs distracts the public from economic

[596] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, to all Polish diplomatic representatives abroad, 10 Jan. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/14/8.

[597] Jozef Potocki, Polish Ambassador in Washington, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 12 Jan. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/N/9.

problems at home, he was actually being played by his political supporters, in particular Bernard Baruch, Governor Lehman, Justice Frankfurter and Secretary Morgenthau, whose chief objective is staring a world war.[598] Potocki complemented this analysis by observations from his meeting with American Ambassador to Paris, William C. Bullitt, who believed that Poland was too strong to take German threat seriously and apparently waxed about 'the aptness of the Polish foreign policy so splendidly directed by the Minister, [and] which not only shielded Poland but granted her victory during the [recent] crisis'.[599]

Similarly, Ambassador Lukasiewicz (himself a friend of Bullitt's since their time as Ambassadors in Moscow) reported from Paris that the realisation that the Polish-German relation was not threatened alerted the French to the importance of their alliance with Warsaw. He averred that: 'in a welcome and healthy process, which reflects the actual balance of power in the region, Poland is rising to the position of France's main Eastern European ally, while Russia becomes a secondary agent […] tasked with protecting Warsaw's rear'.[600] The Ambassador pointed to Beck's independent policy as the reason for the French reappraisal of Poland. Unfortunately, he did not explain how this corresponded with the lack of trust in Poland's actual military strength that pervaded the corridors of power in Paris and London.[601] In reality, despite Beck's earlier declaration, little was being done to improve Poland's relations with Western Powers. Indeed, a letter from this period, written by the British ambassador to Warsaw, Howard Kennard to Lord Halifax, described Beck's

[598] Ibid.
[599] Jozef Potocki, Polish Ambassador in Washington, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw,16 Jan. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/N/9.
[600] Juliusz Lukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 1 Feb. 1939. PISM, A.11.49/N/9.
[601] Juliusz Lukasiewicz, Polish Ambassador in Paris, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 1 Feb. 1939. PISM, A.11.49/N/9.

policy as 'based on distrust' of Great Britain and France.[602] Ambassadors Raczynski and Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski even reported on their success in reassuring the governments to which they have been accredited (Romanian and Italian) about continuing good Polish-German relation.[603]

By then Beck was orchestrating another manifestation of Polish-German friendship. While in Berchtesgaden, he was approached by Ribbentrop about the latter's official visit to Warsaw. Annoyed and clearly unenthusiastic about the prospect, Beck evaded the German's prodding. However, by the time his communiqué went out, the Minister had changed his mind. On 11 January he informed the German Ambassador to Warsaw, Hans von Moltke, that he would welcome Ribbentrop within weeks.[604] The Aswartiges Amt managed to organise the visit in record time, and the German Foreign Affairs Minister arrived in Warsaw on 25 January. Just in time for the Fifth Anniversary of the Polish-German Non-Aggression Treaty.

Due to the festive nature of Ribbentrop's visit, the German leadership seemingly made a tactical decision not to press Poland on the Danzig-related issues.[605] Thus,

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[602] Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 14 Jan. 1939, TNA, C 1342852255, FO 371/23142.

[603] Roger Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in Bucharest, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 13 Jan. 1939, AAN, Ambasada Berlin 925; Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Polish Ambassador in Rome, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 14 Jan. 1939, AAN, Ambasada Berlin 925.

[604] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 468.

[605] Stanislaw Zerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938-1938* [*Polish-German relations 1938-1939*], (Poznan,1998), 200-201; Anita Prazmowska, 'Poland's Foreign Policy: September 1938 – September 1939', *The Historical Journal*, 29 (4), (1986), 859. Ribbentrop would come back to the issue in March 1939, shortly after the German occupation of Prague, when he once again pressed Ambassador Lipski to give to deliver the Polish government's answer to German demands. Michal Jerzy Zacharias, 'Sytuacja miedzynarodowa i polityka zagraniczna II Rzeczpospolitej w swietle

although much to Beck's displeasure the topic inevitably surfaced at discussions between both ministers, it did not cause further aggravation between the sides. Indeed, Beck and Ribbentrop even reached 'a Gentleman's Agreement that in the event of the League of Nations' withdrawal from Danzig, a joint Polish-German declaration will be issued confirming the status quo in the city.'[606] Ribbentrop also assured President Moscicki that 'there exist no such issues in the Polish-German relationship to which he – Ribbentrop – when working with Minister Beck, could not find a solution to.'[607] What is more, German determination to please Poland, borne out of their intention to ensure her cooperation, succeeded in completely confusing the Polish Foreign Ministry Officials. First, Beck's Chef de Cabinet, Michal Lubienski noticed that Ribbentrop's speech during the reception organised in his honour by the Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs was 'warmer in tone' than Beck's one.[608] Then, Polish diplomats placed great emphasis on Ribbentrop's choice of verb when he spoke of the deepening (*vertiefen*) of Polish-German cooperation. They became convinced their position became strong enough to secure German concessions. Ambassador Lipski even argued that Poland should 'at least get an extension of the 1934 Treaty' but Beck haughtily declared that he 'would not ask the Germans for anything.'[609] Yet, he too appeared unsure of what to make of Ribbentrop's visit.

He was clearly unhappy about the re-emergence of the Danzig issue, the outcome of his talk with Ribbentrop, and how it might affect the public mood in both

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polskich dokumentow dyplomatycznych z 1939 r.' ['The international situation and foreign policy of the Second Polish Republic a study of 1939 Polish diplomatic documents'], *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 38(2), (2006), 148-149.

606 Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 480.

607 Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 478.

608 Ibid., 478.

609 Ibid., 479.

countries.[610] On the other hand, however, Beck had insisted on the German Minister's January arrival and later remarked to Szembek that: 'it was a good thing, that Ribbentrop came to Warsaw and saw for himself what Poland was.'[611] He was convinced that the German was impressed by Polish modernity and the country's cultural tradition. Favourable coverage of the visit in German press and an unexpected mention of Poland in Hitler's speech on the sixth anniversary of his coming to power in Germany, appear to have convinced Beck to evaluate it positively.[612] This resulted in another optimistic communiqué to Polish diplomatic missions that assured them that 'both governments are determined to uphold the principle of non-aggression established by the 1934 Treaty and are striving to make it permanent.'[613] Beck had, of course, once again misjudged the situation and, once again, he had succeeded in misleading Polish diplomats about the state of Polish-German relations. One example is the Polish Ambassador to Tokyo, Tadeusz Romer, who, upon receiving Beck's telegram, wrote how pleased he was to hear that the situation in Eastern Europe had stabilised.[614]

Ribbentrop's smiles and Hitler's apparent friendliness lulled Beck into a false sense of security. But the Germans were not ready to give up and the pressure on Poland was to increase again. Speaking with Szembek a few days before von

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[610] Jozef Beck, *Ostatni Raport* [*The Last Report*], (Warszawa, 1987), 163; Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*,484.

[611] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 484.

[612] Stefan Lubomirski, Press Attache, to Jozef Beck, the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 28 Jan. 1939., AAN, Ambasada Berlin 804; Adolf Hitler"s speech from 30 Jan. 1939 quoted in Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 484 and 709.

[613] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to all Polish diplomatic representatives abroad, 31 Jan. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/N/8/4.

[614] Tadeusz Romer, Polish Ambassador in Tokyo, to Jan Szembek, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 2 Feb. 1939, PISM, A.11.E/1495.

Ribbentrop's arrival, Warchalowski the Polish Consul in East Prussia, warned about the growing anti-Polish sentiment within the German officer corps. What is more, he informed the Deputy Foreign Minister about the completion of a second line of fortifications around Koenigsberg which was clearly designed with a Polish-German conflict in mind.[615] There exists no evidence about whether Szembek passed this information on to the Second Department of General Staff (Polish military intelligence) which was then in a state of chaos caused by Rydz-Smigly's replacing its Head, Colonel Pelczynski, with his confidant, Smolenski who had previously served as the commanding officer at the Centre of Cavalry Training in Grudziadz and had no intelligence experience.[616]

This chaos was compounded by Beck's refusal to act upon vital information supplied to him by the Service. According to Beck's *Final Report*, the Second Department suggested that Germany were unwilling to compromise but he seemingly ignored them. An agent had been planted as Ribbentrop's driver, informed Oddzial II that soon after finishing his conversation with Beck, the German Minister remarked to Moltke that 'they [the Poles] are tough. We might have to change our planned order of things and deal with other issues first.'[617] It is reasonable to assume that these 'other issues' meant the aggressive moves in Czechoslovakia and Lithuania which, the Nazis hoped, would shock the Polish leadership into compliance.

Jozef Beck was also not aware that, prior to his arrival, Ribbentrop was instructed to verify German leaders' suspicion that Minister Beck conducted his

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[615] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 476.

[616] Smolenski received his nomination in late 1938 but, due to his inexperience, he deferred his start date until February to prepare for his new role. Unfortunately, the rapidly deteriorating international situation meant that he was never able to fully control the work of his Department. Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku*, 135.

[617] Beck, *Ostatni Raport,* 163.

policy independently of other Polish leaders.[618] This is likely why, during his meeting with Marshal Rydz-Smigly, Ribbentrop was extremely flattering about the Polish army, which he even contrasted in favourable terms with the much weakened Red Army.[619] He did not make any explicit hints about the Anti-Comintern Pact or Polish-German military cooperation but, given that he later proceeded to complain about the volatility of the USSR and German lack of intelligence in this country, one may presume that he was trying to sound the Army's and Rydz-Smigly's personal opinion on these issues. As few sources documenting Ribbentrop's visit survive to this day, it is unclear whether the German succeeded. However, considering that he proved deaf to all previous German overtures, it is unlikely that that time was any different.

The Unlikely Alliances

'One just does not know what the Soviets might do tomorrow', Ribbentrop allegedly told Rydz-Smigly in the meeting discussed above.[620] In hindsight, one could almost misconstrue this as a slip of the tongue that should have made the Poles think. Especially given that by late January 1939, the first signs that the Soviet Union might be looking for a détente with the Third Reich began arriving on Beck's desk. First, the Soviet Union demanded guarantees from Finland that the country would not join in any anti-Soviet alliance.[621] Soon after that, the Polish Legate to Helsinki, Henryk Sokolnicki, reported back a conversation one of his staff had with the Chief of the Finnish Air Force, a known Polonophile, General Jarl Lundquist. Lundquist

[618] Zerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie*, 201.
[619] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 479.
[620] Ibid., 479.
[621] Ibid., 190.

had returned from a recent aviation exhibition in Paris where one of the French Generals 'offered [him] a bet that by Autumn 1939 Poland would be partitioned for the fourth time and that France would be unable or unwilling to intervene on Poland's behalf.'[622] This document was passed on to the Chief of General Staff, General Waclaw Stachiewicz but Polish diplomats continued to down-play the risk of a German-Soviet détente, toeing the line set out by Minister Beck, who believed Hitler's anti-Bolshevism to be dogmatic and '[did] not believe that Germany and Russia could enter an alliance.'[623] Indeed, five days after Sokolnicki's report, Miroslaw Arciszewski evaluated the likelihood of an agreement between Berlin and Moscow as low. A handwritten remark mentioned that the idea 'persists' among the French military but Arciszewski's finished draft stated that: 'we [the Polish authorities] have not noticed any attempts to forge closer contacts between Moscow and Berlin. We have, however, confirmed Hitler's uncompromising attitude to Bolshevism and the USSR. Even the value of Russo-German economic exchange had decreased recently.'[624]

Meanwhile, the Polish Ambasador to Moscow, Waclaw Grzybowski reported that the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Potiomkin told him that, in a move initiated by unspecified members of the 'German decision-making spheres', a group of German trade representatives would shortly be arriving in Moscow.[625] The significance of this

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[622] Michal Sokolnicki, Polish Ambassador in Ankara, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 12 Jan. 1939, AAN, MSZ 508.

[623] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to all Polish diplomatic representatives abroad, 1 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.11.53/23/112; also, Michal Lubienski, Jozef Beck's Chef de Cabinet, in a written statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, undated, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/11; and Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 186.

[624] An internal report by Miroslaw Arciszewski, Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 17 Jan. 1939, AAN, MSZ 6655.

[625] Waclaw Grzybowski, Polish Ambassador in Moscow, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 21 Jan. 1939, AAN, MSZ 6655.

move was lost on Beck because the Poles too, were due to complete a trade agreement with the Soviets on 19 February 1939. Indeed, this apparent eagerness to focus on economic matters only strengthened Beck's conviction and prompted his Chief of Staff, Michal Lubienski, to declare that the USSR's 'internal weakening [presumably meaning the Stalinist purges] and recent diplomatic defeats [exclusion from the Munich Conference]' were indications that the country would withdraw from the international arena'.[626] As late as March 1939, Beck proclaimed his trust in Hitler to his Romanian counterpart full name Gafencu, and argued that German rearmament was of no concern to Poland.[627] In this spirit, he ignored the information supplied by the British[628] and, later, Ciano's warning that the relations between the Axis and Moscow were different to what they appeared.[629] Worse, Polish authorities did not appear concerned when, a few days after Hitler renounced the Polish-German Non-Aggression Pact on 28 April 1939, the Jewish Soviet Foreign Minister Litvinov was replaced by the gentile Vyacheslav Molotov.[630] Indeed, the Polish Ambassador

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[626] Michal Lubienski, Jozef Beck's Chef de Cabinet in Warsaw, to Tadeusz Romer, Polish Ambassador in Tokyo, 25 Feb. 1939. AAN, MSZ 6655.

[627] Gafencu arrived in Poland on 4 March 1939. Miroslaw Arciszewski, Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1.

[628] On 6 May 1939, Szembek informed the Polish Embassy in Moscow that the British Charge d'Affaires in Kaunas, Preston, informed the Polish Legate, Franciszek Charwat, that von Weizaecker had apparently approached the Soviet Ambassador with a proposition of a Non-Aggression Pact. Jan Szembek, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Waclaw Grzybowski, Polish Ambassador in Moscow, 6 May 1939, AAN, MSZ 6655.

[629] Galeazzo Ciano implied this in conversation with the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Aleksander Cincar-Markovic who later passed it on to the Polish Legate in Belgrade, Roman Debicki. Roman Debicki, Polish Legate in Belgrade, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 1 May 1939, PISM, A.12.53/23/112. According to Ciano's diplomatic papers on the 7 May 1939. Malcolm Muggeridge (ed.), *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, (London, 1948), 286. This is not inconsistent with Cincar-Markovic having heard this on his visit to Rome in late April 1939 relaying the information to Debicki upon his return to Belgrade.

[630] For detailed accounts and analysis of this changer refer to Derek Watson, *Molotov: A Biography*, (Basingstoke, 2005); Godfrey Roberts, 'The Fall of Litvinov: A Revisionist View', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (4), (1992), 639-657; and Albert Resis, 'The Fall of Litvinov: Harbinger of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52 (1), (2000), 33-56.

to Moscow, Waclaw Grzybowski was convinced that 'due to the country's internal condition, the Soviet Union must avoid a common Soviet-German border.'[631] Considering all this, Beck could not have reacted to the news of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact with anything but shock and the exclamation that 'Hitler had betrayed his own nation. And if the German society does not react to what had happened, the National-Socialist doctrine will collapse.'[632]

We know, in contrast, that Marshal Rydz-Smigly can hardly be described as pro-German. We have also seen that, while he previously gave the Minister a more or less free hand in the formation of Polish-German policy, the delay in communicating German territorial claims in Poland made him suspicious of the information he received from the MFA. Indeed, following this incident, Rydz-Smigly insisted on personally interviewing Polish diplomats arriving in Warsaw.[633] Thus, it is not surprising that, despite the optimism coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Marshal took warnings about a Nazi-Soviet détente more seriously. In May 1939, the Military Attaché in Berlin, Antonii Szymanski had a private conversation with the whistle-blowing General Karl Boedenschatz during which the German reportedly told him that 'if Hitler becomes convinced that Germany can be surrounded by Poland in the East, he will not hesitate to ally himself with the Devil himself.'[634]

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631 Waclaw Grzybowski, Polish Ambassador in Moscow, to Jan Szembek, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 9 May 1939 reprinted in Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 741.

632 Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1.

633 When Ambassador Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski failed to visit the Marshal during a stay in Warsaw, he received an official reprimand. Edward Rydz-Smigly, General Inspector for the Armed Forces in Warsaw, to Boleslaw Wieniawa-Dlugoszowski, Polish Ambassador in Rome, 9 May 1939, AAN, Ambasada Rzym 24.

634 This was the second occasion when Bodenschatz tried to warn about the possibility of a German-Soviet agreement. Antonii Szymanski, *Zly Sasiad: Niemcy 1932-1939 w oswietleniu polskiego*

Having learnt about this, Rydz-Smigly immediately summoned Szymanski to Warsaw to find out more about the situation. Rydz-Smigly interviewed Szymanski together with the Chief of Staff Stachiewicz, who was in much closer contact with Beck and subscribed to the view that Germany is not ready for war and would thus like to avoid it.[635] Indeed, the attaché concluded that the majority of Polish commanders believed that in his actions in Czechoslovakia and Klaipeda, Hitler simply went too far trying to stir international panic.[636] And yet, Rydz-Smigly was seemingly determined to verify Szymanski's information and instructions were issued to Polish diplomats to check the intelligence about a Nazi-Soviet détente.[637] Although the Military attaché would later claim that his warnings were never taken seriously.

With most of Rydz-Smigly's papers lost, we have no way of determining what exactly happened between the end of May, when this instruction was issued, and the arrival of the first responses. Perhaps, aware of the financial difficulties faced by the Polish Army, Marshal Rydz-Smigly did not believe that it could withstand a war on two fronts.[638] Or perhaps, he was worried about soldiers' morale. Maybe he simply felt out of his depth and chose to believe the optimism of others instead of facing up

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attaché wojskowego w Berlinie [*Bad neighbour: Germany 1932-1939 in the writings of the Polish Military Attaché in Berlin*], (London, 1959), 140-141.

635 According to major Tadeusz Szumowski, Head of the Western Section of the Polish Intelligence Service, Stachiewicz looked to Beck and other external sources to make up his mind, disregarding the materials/information supplied by the Second Department and the Staff. Tadeusz Szumowski, former Head of the Western Section of the Polish Intelligence Service, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 30 Apr. 1941, PISM, B I.6i/10. Also, Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 549.

636 Symanski, *Zly sasiad*, 143.

637 Ibid., 143.

638 Rydz-Smigly conferred about lack of funds with Zaleski in June 1939. August Zaleski, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 24 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/15.

to the possibility of 'dying on the Saski Square, sabres in hand.'[639] We will never know what influenced Rydz-Smigly's decision. What we do know, however, is that, when the first responses to his instruction arrived, Rydz-Smigly clearly ignored them because his defence strategy never addressed the possibility of joint Russian-German attack.[640] An odd decision considering that, unlike the haphazard Defense Plan 'Z' (West), the Defence Plan 'W' (East) was complete.[641]

However, before we consider Poland's military preparedness in relation to the country's handling of Germany in the final months preceding the outbreak of the war in Europe, we shall look at the second unlikely alliance of 1939, the Anglo-Polish bilateral treaty. The agreement, radically altered Poland's strategic position while, at the same time, furnishing further evidence of the lack of trust and cooperation between foreign policy makers and the military.

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[639] Pilsudski reportedly refused to consider the 'N (Germany) + R (Russia)' option during military exercises because he thought war on two fronts was 'nonsensical' and would mean 'dying here, on the Saski Square, sabers in hand, defending national honour.' Roman Wapinski, *Polityka i politycy. O polskiej scenie politycznej w XX wieku* [*Politics and Politicians. Comments on the Polish political scene in the 20th century*], (Wroclaw, 2006), 80.

[640] For example, Consul Stanislaw Kara warned about an upcoming political Nazi-Soviet Alliance as advocated by Economy Minister Funk and Governor von Epp. Stanislaw Kara, Polish Consul General in Berlin, to Jozef Beck Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 3 Jul. 1939, AAN, Ambasada Berlin 925.

[641] Work on the Defence Plan 'Z' (West) officially began on 4 March 1939. However, it was not until after the German occupation of Prague that a decision was taken by Genera Stachiewicz to focus on it. The nearly finished Plan 'W' (East) served as a rough template for the rushed strategy that was largely improvised, despite abundant information on German O de B in peacetime. The main tactical thought of the plan was to 'defend the territories deemed necessary for the conduct of war [Greater Poland and the territory west of middle-Vistula and south of upper-Vistula] while inflicting as heavy losses on the Germans as possible, to use advantageous opportunities to carry out counter strikes by reserves and, most importantly, to hold on until the allied offensive in the West.' Czeslaw Grzelak and Henryk Stanczyk, *Kampania Polska 1939 Roku* [*The Polish Defensive Campaign of 1939*], (Warszawa, 2005), 130. This belated start meant that, by September 1939, only a sketch plan for one major battle and strategic positions were drawn prompting Marshal Rydz-Smigly to consider 'the possibility that, in the first phase of the conflict [Poland] might lose parts of [her] territory which would later be won back.' Grzelak and Stanczyk, *Kampania Polska*, 130.

Earlier, we focussed on Jozef Beck's apparent wish to improve Poland's relations with the West, which mostly meant Britain as French weakness was widely assumed. Indeed, by early 1939 the Franco-Polish alliance had become increasingly theoretical, prompting a remark from the Chief of Staff, General Waclaw Stachiewicz that 'all [France] is now good for is her money lending power.'[642] A few months later, on 3 April, he was even less generous: complaining about the apparent French unwillingness to fulfil the material side of her Rambouillet Treaty obligations.[643]

Nevertheless, save for instructions for Raczynski to visit the Foreign Office, little was done to actually improve the Anglo-Polish relationship. And not surprisingly, given the 'strong distaste and hurt' the British reportedly felt towards Poland following her conduct during the Czech crisis of October 1938.[644] This state of affairs persisted until 15 March 1939, when, breaking the Munich Agreement, Nazi forces occupied Prague, forced upon her the quasi independence of Slovakia and made it a

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642 Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 478.

643 Ibid., 549. The Poles were particularly unhappy with the delays in the disbursement of the material and construction elements of the loan. Despite finalising the payment schedule in August 1937, the sloth explained by France's own armament needs as well as prior contractual obligations to Switzerland and Romania resulted in repeated Polish diplomatic interventions. Henryk Batowski, *Kryzys dyplomatyczny w Europie, jesień 1938 — wiosna 1939* [*The diplomatic crisis in Europe, autumn 1938 – spring 1939*]; (Warsaw, 1962), 48. Western historians including Zara Steiner and Martin Alexander concur with the assessment of French manufacturing capability but also point to Paris's and Warsaw's different objectives. France saw its alliance with Poland as part of a wider regional strategy whereas Poland wanted to improve her military capability and was hostile to collaboration with Czechoslovakia or Soviet Russia. Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 393-394. This view was shared by the contemporary Polish military attaché in Paris, colonel Wojciech Fyda. Piotr Stawecki, 'Pozyczka francuska z 1936 roku' ['The French loan of 1936'], *Kwartalnik Historyczny* (1967), 74(1), 65-66.

644 Edward Raczynski, former Polish Ambassador in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 21 Apr. 1941, PISM, A.11/144/273. Indeed, Miroslaw Arciszewski claims that this negative British attitude prompted Beck's January 1939 instruction for Raczynski to organise a visit in London. Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs or Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1; Weinberg, *The foreign policy of Hitler's Germany*, 478-479; Robert Young, 'The Aftermath of Munich: The Course of French Diplomacy, October 1938 to Mach 1939', *The Journal of Historical* Studies, 8(2), (1973), 309.

German protectorate on 16 March. For the first time since the 1934 Treaty, the Polish authorities had received no warning from the Germans and despite a number of reports few suspected Hitler would act in Czechoslovakia; although admittedly, few in Poland were concerned with the fate of her southern neighbour.[645] The presence of German troops in Slovakia was an altogether different matter that caused alarm in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, according to Arciszewski, 'especially the General Staff, because all our defence plans became useless'.[646] In one of the last attempts to pressurise Poland,[647] the Germans immediately congratulated Beck on achieving his goal of creating a common Polish-Hungarian border but the Poles no longer cared.[648] Unlike in 1938, when the acquisition of Tscheschen Silesia and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Lithuania were treated as major foreign policy successes, that long-standing achievement now seemed empty when compared with the growing German threat. Poland's public opinion and political elite

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[645] A notable example Tadeusz Szumowski's, Head of the Western Section of the Polish Intelligence Service, report from 7 March 1939 which he compiled information, obtained from Consul General Feliks Chiczewski in Leipzig, that Germany is planning an aggressive operation in Czechoslovakia later in the month. His warning was first dismissed in Berlin (by Ambassador Lipski) and then at home. The report was scribbled with 'nonsense' and 'must be drunk' and only the German entry into Prague saved Szymanski from facing a disciplinary action. Tadeusz Szumowski, former Head of the Western Section of the Polish Intelligence Service, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 30 Apr. 1941, PISM, B I.6i/10. The warnings issued by the Military Attaché in Prague, and Munich-based spy-ring 'Bilbao' were similarly overlooked. See Aleksander Wozny, *Niemieckie Przygotowania do Wojny z Polska* [*German preparations for the war against Poland*] (Warszawa, 2000), 245.

[646] Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs or Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/1. In truth this statement was an exaggeration as by the time the war broke out, in September 1939, the defensive Plan 'Z' was revised to, incorrectly, expect an attack from Slovakia and Silesia. Watt, *Bitter Glory*, 416.

[647] Marek Kornat quotes an entry from Goebbels' diary, made on 25 March 1939, which reads that 'Hitler intends to put some light pressure in Poland and hopes for a positive outcome. But there is a fly in the ointment, we will have to guarantee all of Poland's borders.' Marek Kornat, *Polska 1939 roku wobec paktu Ribbentrop-Molotow: Problem zblizenia niemiecko-sowieckiego w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczpospolitej* [*1939 Poland and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact: The foreign policy of the Second Polish republic and the problem of a Soviet-German detente*], (Warszawa, 2002), 266.

[648] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Jozef Lipski, Polish Ambassador in Berlin, 16 Mar. 1939. AAN, MSZ/5437; also, Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 172.

were, once again, turning against the Foreign Minister. The Parliamentary Commission on Foreign Affairs became extremely critical of Beck. One of its members, General Lucjan Zeligowski, even accused Beck of treason for what he was 'called out' by Colonel Zygmunt Wenda.[649] Aware of its declining popularity, in May 1939 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs endeavoured to improve its standing with the public by inviting members of all political parties to join in its propaganda campaign. This initiative was blocked by Rydz-Smigly.[650] As we know, the Marshal and his OZN have been running an extremely successful personal propaganda campaign and benefited from Beck's poor public rating. What is more, he was no longer interested in political dialogue with the opposition and allowed for continued use of the Bereza Kartuska concentration camp[651] whose inmates included critics of Polish military policy.[652]

As the chaos in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs intensified, with Beck once again away with 'flu' and mounting German pressure on Lithuania, the United Kingdom

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649 [A*wantura*, brawl] after Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs or Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (thereafter: PISM), A.11.49/Cz/3/1; [O*stre starcie,* face-off.] after Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 528 and 530.

650 Miroslaw Arciszewski, former Second Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs or Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 27 Feb. 1941, Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum (thereafter: PISM), A.11.49/Cz/3/1.

651 The camp, modeled on German camps in Oranienburg and Dachau was created in 1934, following the assassination of Minister Bronislaw Pieracki. At the time of its inception Bereza was described as a concentration camp. However, current Polish historiography refrains from calling it that due to the use of this term in Polish post-war propaganda. Nevertheless, foreign historians and the Library of Congress continue to do so. Andrzej Garlicki, *Piekne lata trzydzieste* [*The beautiful Thirties*], (Warszawa, 2008) 247-252.

652 Journalist Stalislaw Cat-Mackiewicz was repeatedly threatened with internment and eventually imprisoned in Bereza for 17 days (between 23 March and 9 April 1939) for his criticism of the National Defence Fund (a fund-rising vehicle drawing contributions for armaments from both the state and the public), insufficient weaponry and 'undermining public belief in Polish war readiness.' Stanislaw Cat-Mackiewicz, *Polityka Becka* [*Beck's Policy*], (Krakow, 2010), 187; also, Garlicki, *Piekne lata*, 250.

renewed its interest in Poland.[653] And, proving Michal Lubienski correct when he observed that 'everyone is somehow courting Poland,'[654] on the 21 March, the British simultaneously communicated 'their proposals for a joint declaration, consultation and common defence' to the Polish Ambassador in London, Raczynski, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[655] According to witnesses, Beck was extremely pleased that the British approached Poland and not vice versa but, staying true to Pilsudski's beliefs, instead of a multilateral agreement between Poland, the UK, Russia and France or a unilateral British guarantee, he wanted to pursue a bilateral Anglo-Polish treaty. He took this proposal to President Moscicki and Rydz-Smigly and obtained their agreement.[656]

Looking back at Beck's speeches and papers from the period after the occupation of Prague, it becomes clear that the Minister held a distorted view of the levels of war-readiness and military capability of the Polish Army and there is some indication that this was a result if deliberate misinformation by the military command. First, when Beck addressed senior foreign ministry staff, on 24 March he told them that

> Germany is no longer predictable (….) Together with the highest authorities in the state, we have drawn a line (…) beyond which comes

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[653] On 20 March 1939, Germany issued an ultimatum to Lithuania demanding the surrender the port town of Klaipeda (Memel). It was ceded to Germany on 22 March 1939. Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Starting World War II 1937-1939*, (Chicago, 1980), 536; Richard Watt, *Bitter Glory. Poland and its Fate 1918-1939*, (New York, 1982), 394.

[654] Michal Lubienski, Minister Beck's Chef de Cabinet, to Eugeniusz Romer, Polish Ambassador in Tokyo, 14 Mar. 1939, PISM, Kolekcja Ambasadora E. Raczynskiego.

[655] Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 21 Mar. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/1; also, Starzenski, *Trzy lata*,173; Anita Prazmowska, 'The Eastern Front and the British Guarantee to Poland in March 1939, *European History Quarterly*, 14 (183), 183-185. According to Donald Cameron Watt, the British proposals were actually sent out to Warsaw late on 20 March. Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came. The immediate origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939*, (London, 2001), 178.

[656] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 183.

> out Polish *non-possumus*. Meaning [that] we will fight (….) [I]t is more sensible to come out toward an enemy than wait for him to come to us. This is a troublesome enemy because it appears to be lacking restraint in its ideas and actions. Perhaps it can regain its sense when met with firmness, which had not happened before (….) With her 9 divisions, Germany has been strutting around Europe but no one can take Poland with such force.[657]

The implication is that Beck spoke with Rydz-Smigly and that the military leadership considered starting a war to be a *viable* last resort option in the Polish-German diplomatic conflict. Indeed, in a later conversation with Ambassador Kennard, Beck told him that prior to the Anglo-Polish agreement, he 'liaised with the army and was informed about the capability of Polish forces (….) Our troops are positioned in such a way that they are ready for both defensive and offensive combat.'[658] He then went on to explain that Marshal Pilsudski had taught the Polish army rigorous realism and to eschew 'paper' calculations. And although Beck conceded that material difficulties prevented Poland from taking advantage of its human resources, it is clear that the Minister was a victim of optimistic military

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[657] Zaranski (ed,), *Diarusz i Teki*, 529. We will not focus on Beck's obvious underestimation of German military strength. Numerous historians have discussed this issue and Jan Weinstein identified two possible explanations for it. Namely, Beck could have been referring to German troop movements in Saxony in May 1938 or press reports from March 1939, which estimated that Germany occupied the romp-Czechoslovak state with approximately 120.000 soldiers which corresponds with roughly 9-10 divisions. Ibid., 715; also, Marian Zgorniak, *Europa w przededniu wojny. Sytuacja militarna w latach 1938-1939* (*Europe in the run-up to the war. The military situation between 1938-1939*), (Krakow, 1993), 37.

[658] Jozef Potocki, Head of the Western Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 24 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.12.49/WB/1.

propaganda. Indeed, even as late as 22 July, Beck continued to believe that Poland's strategic position was good.[659]

He was not alone. The army embarked upon a systematic and extremely successful disinformation, or perhaps even auto-disinformation, campaign.[660] The diplomats (although some later denied it), public[661] and, according to Frankowski, even the allied French General Staff were led to overestimate the Polish Army's strength.[662] In his only authorised press interview, Marshal Rydz-Smigly described the Polish Army as 'smaller than [the] German but a good army' and stated that Poland would 'fight for its independence in any circumstances, even devoid of allies.'[663] Indeed, the official brief supplied by the Polish General Staff to Counsellor Frankowski insisted that 'the Polish army does not need allied support, [though] admittedly German East Prussia poses certain strategic problems but, in the event of war, it becomes a German liability because it can be easily cut off from the mainland; German occupation of Slovakia will also turn to haunt them.'[664] In fact,

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[659] Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 679. Incidentally, Poland allies were also overly optimistic about the country's military capability. In Paris, general Gamelin overestimated not only the prowess of the Polish army but also the extent of the country's rearmament and preparations. Martin Alexander, *The Republic in Danger. General Maurice Gamelin and the politics of French defence, 1933-1940*, (Cambridge, 1992), 311.

[660] According to Ambassador Edward Raczynski, following his official visit to Poland, British General Edmund Ironside concluded that the Chief of Staff and the Polish military leadership are deluded in their assessment of the military situation. Edward Raczynski, former Polish Ambassador in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 21 Apr. 1941, PISM, A.11/144/273. In his diaries, published after the war, Ironside is less blunt. In a note dated 13 July 1939, he wrote: "The Poles seem to have too low an opinion of the German Army's value. They consider that they are over-motorised." Edmund Ironside, *Time unguarded: the Ironside diaries, 1937-1940*, (Westport, 1974), 82.

[661] Reminiscences of Minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski. Michal Komar, *Wladyslaw Bartoszewski: Wywiad Rzeka* [*Extended interview with Wladyslaw Bartoszewski*], (Warszawa, 2006), 29-30.

[662] Feliks Frankowski's, former Counselor in the Polish Embassy in Paris, statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 31 Mar. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/5.

[663] Mary Heaton Vorse's interview with Edward Rydz-Smigly. July 1939, published in August 1939 in *Morze i Kolonie*, No.8, Archimum Polskiej Agencji Prasowej (PAP), http://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/wywiad-z-marszalkiem-edwardem-smiglym-rydzem-lipiec-1939-r, accessed on 30 Dec. 2014.

[664] Feliks Frankowski's, former Counselor in the Polish Embassy in Paris, statement to the Winiarski

both Rydz-Smigly and Frankowski were either mistaken or deliberately overstating Polish strength as a rough comparison of the Polish and German forces (see below) clearly indicates the latter's superiority:

German and Polish Forces in September 1939 [665]

	Total men	Armd./ mot. Divs.	In. Divs.	Mtn. Divs.	Cav. Brigs.	Total divisions (brigades)	Armd. vehicles	Artillery pieces	Aircraft	Ships
Germany	1.5m	15	37	1	1	53 (1)	3600	6000	1929	40
Poland	1.3m	1 brig.	37	–	11	37 (12)	750	4000	900	50

That during July 1939 military negotiations with representatives of the British Army,[666] Marshal Rydz-Smigly refused to travel to London and disclose essential military information because 'these things are covered by secrecy', illustrates just how determined the Polish command was to pretend that 'the military matters [were] all right.'[667] Indeed, according to Edward Raczynski, the military command's obstinacy caused a rift between the Marshal and the Ambassador in the summer of 1939. More importantly, however, Rydz-Smigly was also able to stall the debate on a solution to the on-going debate about Poland's fiscal and economic policy, preventing devaluation and recalibrating the economy into war-mode.[668]

Investigative Commission, 31 Mar. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/5.

665 Table after Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 1020.

666 On 6 May 1939, Ambassador Kennard informed deputy Minister Arciszewski that a British Military delegation would soon be arriving in Warsaw to negotiate a military alliance. PISM, A.12.49/WB/3. Interestingly, although the Ambassador assured Arciszewski that an official instruction on the matter should be expected within days, it did not arrive until two months later. Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, to Clifford Norton, British Charge d'Affaires in Warsaw, 6 Jul. 1939, TNA, C 94825418, FO 417. General Ironside learned that he was to lead the mission on 4 July. The visit began on the 17 and ended on the 21 July. Ironside, *Time unguarded*, 76.

667 Edward Raczynski, former Polish Ambassador in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 21 Apr. 1941, PISM, A.11/49/Cz/3/19.

668 Edward Raczynski, *The British-Polish Alliance, its origin and meaning*, (London, 1948), 47.

In these circumstances, one cannot be surprised that on the eve of his trip to London in April 1939, Minister Beck – always inclined to bombast and posturing – declared that 'Poland must speak with England [like an equal] *d'egale a egale*. We're not ones to take gifts. And if there is to be a war, we will fight one way or another'.[669]

Later in this chapter we will see that Beck did not lose hope that the conflict could be resolved through diplomatic means until the very end. Misled about the Polish military strength and defence capability, he found himself pursuing a foreign policy that befitted a country larger and stronger than interwar Poland.

'There is still time for diplomacy...'

...said Beck to his secretary Starzenski after receiving the British offer of a multilateral Pact on 21 March 1939 and he most certainly believed it.[670] Beck left for London on 1 April and on his way, met with Ambassador Lipski who informed him of growing German hostility towards Poland. He urged him not to publicise any agreements signed with the British, and to keep the text of such documents compatible with the Franco-Polish Treaty that was accepted and recognised by Berlin.[671] Beck acknowledged Lipski's worries about the supposed 'encircling' ['*Einkreisungspolitik*'] of Germany, stressing that Poland would only ever enter a defensive pact. Indeed, according to his *Final Report*, he expected the London government to propose 'an open arrangement containing generalities' complimented

669 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 193-194.
670 Ibid., 175.
671 Ibid., 184.

by a secret military agreement.[672] What is more, Rydz-Smigly and Moscicki seem also to have been wary of a hostile German reaction and Beck had no mandate to sign a public agreement. However, upon arrival in Britain, Beck's view changed. He interpreted the panic among British parliamentarians as heralding the beginning of their country's involvement in Central Europe and, exceeding his brief, decided to sign and publicise mutual security guarantees.[673] Confiding in his secretary, Beck reasoned that '[his decision] will affect [Polish] relations with Germany, but if war is unavoidable, it's better to show ones cards in advance'.[674] This suggests that he treated the new Anglo-Polish alliance as a 'bargaining chip' in the spat with Berlin.[675] Indeed, describing the events leading to the Anglo-Polish alliance, Beck himself emphasised a 1935 conversation with Hitler, during which the German leader stressed the importance for the Third Reich of good relations with the British Empire.[676] In hindsight, we see that Beck was wrong in his assessment of the situation and not only did the new alliance not give him 'more breathing space,'[677] but it actually reduced his room for manoeuvre almost beyond existence.[678] Beck's Ambassadors in London and Paris confirm that the Minister believed that 'Hitler

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672 Beck, *Ostatni raport*, 175.

673 Pawel Starzenski quotes excerpts from Sir Henry Channon's diary serve as an excellent illustration of the confusion and indecision among British politicians. '[26 March:] I'm not sure that the Polish guarantee is wise. It may stiffen the resistance of the Poles, as we unintentionally stiffened the Czechs last year. [1 April:] Everyone is happy with our guarantee to Poland [5 April:] Colonel Beck's visit was evidently a success... We must have allies, and Poland is now our newfound friend. The Government is getting jitters and is groping for allies everywhere. [17 April:] Something must be done to make the Poles more reasonable towards the German demands over Danzig and make overtures to Germany...' Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 113-114.

674 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 115.

675 Phrase used by Edward Raczynski, former Polish Ambassador in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 21 Apr. 1941, PISM, A.11/49/Cz/3/19.

676 Beck, *Ostatni raport*, 176.

677 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 105.

678 Handwritten annotation on the margin. Howard Kennard, British Ambassador in Warsaw, to Viscount Halifax, Foreign Secretary in London, 9 May 1939, TNA, N 2375230638, FO 371/23699.

liked to get things through threats and blackmail but he would back down in the face of a large scale conflict.'[679] And that, 'by having Britain on [Poland's] side he could avert the war through some sort of a treaty' or perhaps use the possibility of entering a multilateral alliance with the Soviet Union to put pressure on Berlin.[680] Feliks Frankowski even noted that Beck was 'not very happy' about the French guarantees that followed the British declaration of support made on 31 March 1939. Although Paris and London cooperated on the matter, Warsaw was not consulted. Beck complained about this to Ambassador Noel and was reportedly concerned that open French support would incite German fear of 'encirclement.'[681]

As we have already seen, Beck was of course wrong to assume Soviet cooperation but at least in this case, his mistake could be attributed to ignorance. One is, however, puzzled why he thought that the Third Reich might still yield under pressure. We saw that he had after all himself pointed out that Germany had never been challenged before. Moreover, after the occupation of Prague, this conviction cannot be put down to Beck's supposed trust in Hitler's word. While the Führer's open hatred of the Soviet Union made the reconciliation between Bolshevism and National Socialism seem impossible, the Minister had himself stated that in his European policy, Hitler could no longer be trusted.[682] Thus, the only plausible

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[679] Juliusz Lukasiewicz, former Polish Ambassador in Paris, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 22 Nov. 1941, PISM, A.11/Cz/3.

[680] Edward Raczynski, former Polish Ambassador in London, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 21 Apr. 1941, PISM, A.11/49/Cz/3/19.

[681] Feliks Frankwski, former Counselor in the Polish Embassy in Paris, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 31 Mar. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/5.

[682] See the previously cited speech to Ministry officials. Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 715. Moreover, on his way to London, Beck observed that 'a turn of history is coming. I am going to London to maintain peace. But if there is to be a war, we must survive it in decent company where a given word is still worth something.' Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 186. He had also reportedly

explanation for Beck's conviction is that the Army misinformed him. He had been led to not only, overestimate the Polish military strength but also to underestimate the Germans. Tytus Komarnicki suspected that as early as March 1938 (the Anschluss), the Staff misled Beck about the German military capability and that the Minister had been told that Germany has 'wheezing' tanks.[683] We know that Michal Lubienski agreed.[684]

Ambassador Lipski even believed that the reason Polish-German relations became so difficult between Munich and the outbreak of the Second World War was due to the poor coordination of the foreign, economic and military policies out of which the military one was especially poor. Because, 'a state must be aware of its buffer zones against its neighbours.'[685]

Nowhere did Beck's persistent hope that an armed conflict can be averted manifest itself more clearly than in the two failed resignation attempts. One was Beck's own offer to step down following his 5 May speech when he suggested to President Moscicki that a new Minister 'not tainted with accusations of cooperation with Germany' would find it easier to reorient Poland's foreign policy.[686] Beck's reasoning was certainly logical but the President refused to replace him. Whether this was due to lack of suitable alternative or to other reasons remains unclear. By

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stated that 'if Hitler goes mad and starts a war, he will destroy not only Germany but also many other countries apart from his own. Hitler is Austria's revenge for the Battle of Sadova [Könniggrätz]. He will never win this war.' Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 185-186.

683 *'Dychawiczne'* [*Wheezing*] was a phrase used by Tytus Komarnicki, former Polish Representative to the League of Nations, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 5 May, 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/8.

684 See Chapter Seven, page 238.

685 Lipski argued the Polish High Command focussed too much on Danzig and too little on defensively weak spots such as Slovakia. Jozef Lipski, former Polish Ambassador in Berlin, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 28 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/10.

686 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 214.

late May, however, Beck ruled out stepping down and reportedly insisted that he was 'honour bound to stay.'[687] He was also concerned that his departure could be interpreted as 'burning of bridges' with Berlin and thus, render future negotiations more difficult.[688]

The second failed resignation was that of Jozef Lipski. Following the German renouncement of the 1934 Treaty and Beck's 5 May speech, the Ambassador decided he 'could no longer remain in Berlin' and suggested Szembek, Arciszewski and Lubienski as possible replacements.[689] Beck initially ignored Lipski's request but later conceded that he had indeed 'spent himself there'[690] and approached Szembek with an offer of the posting. Beck believed that there were signs that Germany wanted a dialogue with Poland and that, despite the inability to maintain a friendly and close relationship with Berlin; a compromise could still be reached. This, however, required a new ambassador, someone 'experienced', 'calm', immune to unpleasantness and 'not from Poznan [Posen] [Greater Poland].'[691] Beck's intention to negotiate was even more evident in his response to Szembek's concerns that his well known pro-rapprochement position would mislead Berlin and the rest of Europe that Poland was ready for concessions. He did not want to send 'anybody overly bellicose to Berlin'.[692] In the end, the matter of Szembek's transfer to Berlin was never finalised, there were no Polish-German talks, despite the British and Vatican's

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687 Ibid., 214.
688 Ibid., 214.
689 Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 600.
690 *'Zgral sie tam'* [*He's played his part*] Ibid., 615.
691 Between 1795 and 1918, the Greater Poland region formed part of the Prussian Partition and an anti-German sentiment persisted in the region even after independence. Ambassadors Jozef Lipski and the Raczynski brothers all came from this region. Ibid., 615.
692 Ibid., 617.

attempts to initiate negotiations, and Lipski remained in post until the outbreak of the war.

Beck's flawed assessment of Poland's military situation and overdeveloped pride are also evident in his approach to the economic negotiations with the British. As we read earlier, Jozef Lipski acknowledged the lack of coordination between Polish foreign, economic and military policies, but branded the latter weakest. August Zaleski, on the other hand, criticised Beck's high-brow style and accused him of placing little importance to economic matters, which he supposedly considered 'beneath him.'[693] Indeed, the practical ambassador Raczynski urged Beck to initiate economic talks when the Minister arrived in London to sign the Anglo-Polish guarantees.[694] Yet, by 21 April 1939, Poland was 'the only [originally underlined] Eastern European state, which had not taken the opportunity of its recent negotiations with the British government to seek London's financial assistance,' which seems to prove Zaleski's point.[695] Even the British were surprised by this inactivity and Ambassador Kennard ended up approaching Beck, two days after Norton let out the first feelers and a day before Beck was planning to rise the matter himself.[696]

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693 August Zaleski, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 24 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/15.

694 Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 204.

695 British counselor Norton in conversation with economic counselor Wszelaki. Jan Wszelaki, Economic Counselor at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, internal report from 21 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.12.49/WB/3. This conversation is also quoted in Jozef Potocki, Head of the Western Department at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 24 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.12.49/WB/3.

696 Jozef Potocki', Head of the Western Department at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 24 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.12.49/WB/3.

If Zaleski's assessment of Beck's attitude to economic matters was correct, the late commencement of Anglo-Polish financial negotiations could plausibly be explained solely by the Minister's haughtiness and pride. However, Lukasiewicz and Starzenski argued that Beck lacked time to schedule financial negotiations.[697] Nevertheless, he had time to make a demonstration of Polish support for Hungary. And, even Beck's sympathisers agree that the political side of the Minister's April visit to Britain seemed most important to him. Beck refused to drop heavy hints while in London and even when the Anglo-Polish financial negotiations were about to begin he objected to the idea that 'staff talks and … financial talks, … form a foundation for a [future] treaty'.[698]

Nevertheless, upon conclusion of the bilateral agreement, Beck was visibly relieved that Poland would now had the backing of the enormous and strong British Empire. He was convinced that Britain would, if need be, fulfill her treaty obligations towards Poland but exaggerated the scale of any future British assistance and her overall military might. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that Beck's initially cavalier approach to starting monetary talks was in part due to him not knowing the truth about the state of armament of the Polish Army.

Studying documentation from the period, one is struck that apart from Raczynski's insistence, remarkably little attention was given to possible British loans amongst Polish commanders and policy-makers. The Polish Treasury had not liaised with the Foreign Ministry about this matter until 15 April, a week after Beck's return

[697] Starzenski, *Trzy lata*, 204.
[698] Handwritten annotation on the margin of Beck's instruction to Raczynski. Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 12 Jun. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

from London, and even then, an honest assessment of Polish financial needs had yet to be compiled.[699] Indeed, it was only after 21 April that a sense of urgency started creeping into the matter. One can identify a number of possible reasons for this shift. First, the military authorities became increasingly doubtful of France's ability to fulfil the obligations it took upon herself in Rambouillet.[700] Furthermore, the heightened military readiness following the partial mobilisation of 23 March 1939 was taking its toll on Poland's already poor finances. It even became a topic of gossip and the British counsellor Norton asked the Polish Foreign Ministry's economic expert, Wszelaki if it was true that the government's 'Air Force Loan' might be spent to cover the Army's current expenditure rather than building-up the Polish Air Force.[701] Moreover, the Treasury, which had apparently also been kept in the dark about Poland's poor defence capability, was wary of putting the economy on war footing.[702]

Following Beck's cumbersome attempt to open the negotiations that started with a complaint that 'mixing money and politics is not a pleasant thing to do and must only be done for a good reason',[703] a month passed until Warsaw received London's invitation to negotiate, during which time the Poles drove themselves even more hysterical about securing financial help. And yet, falling into a by now all too

[699] Jozef Potocki talking to Szembek about his meeting with Minister Kajetan Morawski and director Domaniewski from the Treasury. Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 559.

[700] Szembek's and Stachiewicz's conversations on the matter as well as secondary literature sources are referenced in detail in footnote 643.

[701] Jan Wszelaki, Economic Counsellor at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, in an internal memo, 21 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

[702] According to the papers of the Chief of Staff, general Waclaw Stachiewicz, Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski worried about over-stretching the economy. Bogdan Stachiewicz, *General Waclaw Stachiewicz. Wspomnienie*, [*Remembering General Waclaw Stachiewicz*], (Warszawa, 2004), 112. Instead, the Treasure decided to raise money through partial devaluation of the zloty. Tymoteusz Pawlowski, *Armia Smiglego. Czwarta w Europie – Siodma na swiecie* [*Smigly's Army. Fourth in Europe – Seventh in the world*], (Warszawa, 2014), 52.

[703] Jozef Potocki, Head of the Western Department in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 24 Apr. 1939, PISM, A.12.49/WB/3.

familiar pattern, neither of the three participating institutions managed to agree on what precisely they wanted to gain from the upcoming talks and how to conduct them.

Initially, Minister Kwiatkowski considered sending a delegation consisting of Adam Koc, Treasury official Wieslaw Domaniewski and, in accordance with Rydz-Smigly's wishes to have his own man there, a military expert. They were to be introduced by Jozef Potocki from the Foreign Ministry. However, the delegation sent was only three men strong, lacking a Rydz-Smigly appointee. This was justified by Koc's military background. Colonel Koc was, according to Beck, 'chosen as the Head of the delegation not, of course, as a representative of the banking industry, but a confidant of the Government who also possessed military experience (as a colonel of the General Staff).'[704] Director Domaniewski and counsellor Wszelaki from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made up the complement. A separate military delegation was to leave for London the following week.

The perceived objectives of the Polish Treasury, Foreign Ministry and the Army were similarly disjointed. Hand-picked by Kwiatkowski, Koc held a delusional view of Polish military strength and believed that the Polish 'enormous land army' would be 'a colossal help to the British Empire' but because these commitments were putting a strain on the weak national economy he expected Britain to pay Poland's mobilisation costs and fund 'other investments succouring Polish defensive efforts including river regulation, rail and motorisation' as well as building reserves of

[704] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 9 Jun. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

munitions and armaments.[705] This mirrored the Treasury Minister's own reluctance to put the economy in war footing. He insisted that 'receiving a British loan was a necessity, [because] if the state of military readiness persisted; it would destroy all he had done for Polish economic revival. And he wouldn't be able to restart the process again.'[706] Of this, Kwiatkowski managed to convince Beck.[707]

Rydz-Smigly, on the other hand, wanted the loan to go towards rearmament in its entirety. Upon seeing the draft of the financial aid memorandum addressed to Britain, he demanded that all mentions of ordinary financial aid (bank loans, economic stimulus money) be removed even though they were put there on the request of Kwiatkowski.[708] Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain even reproached the Polish authorities for their half-hearted commitment to rearmament[709] and wondered whether they should either 'create new large military units' or 'prepare sufficient armaments and munitions reserves.'[710] This lack of understanding only unnecessarily added to the internal tension in Poland. In June 1939, Rydz-Smigly reportedly complained to Zaleski that 'Kwiatkowski didn't have money for rearmament,' it is implied that the Treasury also told Rydz-Smigly that the National Bank refused to

[705] Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 574-575.
[706] Ibid., 577.
[707] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 9 Jun. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.
[708] Jan Wszelaki, Economic Counsellor at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, in an internal memo, 17 May 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.
[709] Specifically, Chamberlain questioned spending on public works and artificially maintaining an expensive currency. Minutes from Raczynski's conversation with Chamberlain. Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 6 Jun. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.
[710] Minutes from Raczynski's conversation with Chamberlain. Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 6 Jun. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

issue a loan to the military. According to Zaleski, who was on the Bank's board, the institution was never approached.[711]

What neither Beck nor anyone within the Polish governing circles realised was that, despite its speeding armament, the United Kingdom was not producing enough equipment and munitions to meet its own domestic need.[712] Their assessment of Britain's financial position was just as wrong. Despite trying to hide its imperial decline by making grand gestures of generosity, London actually had little money to spare. Furthermore, the congenitally blinkered British Treasury did not recognise the strategic importance of extending a loan to Poland. It ranked Warsaw ninth behind Bucharest and Baghdad and slightly ahead of Kabul and Belgrade.[713] And yet, encouraged by statements from Generals Ironside and Carton de Wiart, the Polish Foreign Ministry clung to the idea that Britain would 'go all the way.'[714] This was fed back to the Army and Rydz-Smigly who must have put some credence in it because on 20 July he complained to Szembek about British inconsistency and the 'silly' way in which they were conducting the economic talks.[715]

The negotiations dragged on and despite the Foreign Office's supposed support, the Polish delegates found conversations with Treasury personnel (especially with Sir John Simon, the Chancellor himself) frustrating because they 'treated the matter

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[711] August Zaleski, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, in a statement to the Winiarski Investigative Commission, 24 Feb. 1941, PISM, A.11.49/Cz/3/15.

[712] In a conversation with Szembek on 26 April 1939, Adam Koc excitedly declared that '[Poland] has the whole fleet and air force of the British Empire is behind her.' Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 574.

[713] Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War 1938-1939* (London, 2001), 334.

[714] Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 676.

[715] Ibid., 676.

as purely of economic, monetary and political [but not strategic] nature'[716] and 'did not put forward any practical proposals (…), only a number of arduous demands [devaluation of the Polish currency, restrictions on Polish coal exports] that had little to do with the purpose of the negotiations and harmed Poland's economic interests.'[717] To add, insult to injury, 'the proposed sums,[718] which would be available upon meeting conditions that were unacceptable [to Poland], were merely equal to Polish government's monthly defence expenditure.'[719] Beck appealed, through Ambassador Raczynski to Chamberlain and the British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, but to no avail. Meanwhile, the delay in Anglo-Polish negotiations caused malevolent amusement in Berlin and the Polish Foreign Minister reverted to his high-handed style of politics.[720] Raczynski urged Warsaw not to break off the talks, arguing that 'all the clauses offending [Polish] national sensibilities have been removed.'[721] Nevertheless, on 24 July, Beck decided that since the negotiations were unlikely to allow for 'a fast improvement of Polish army's equipment' the government in Warsaw did not see fit to continue them.[722] Material credits and

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[716] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, undated (Summer) 1939, PISM, A.11.49/N/3.

[717] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 16 Jul. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/N/3.

[718] Poland hoped to receive up to £10m in cash and £20m in material credits. However, as the government in Warsaw did not agree to British conditions, the final agreement, signed in August 1939, did not include a cash loan. Instead Britain was to provide £8 million for equipment, £1.5 million for resources and £2 million for infrastructure. Pawlowski, *Armia Smiglego*, 52.
For comparison, the Polish monthly defence spending in late spring and summer 1939 was approximately 200.000 zloty (£8000 - AK) pcm. Zaranski (ed.), *Diariusz i Teki*, 645. The total armament spend for the period between 1936 and 1939 was 3 billion zlotys (equating to approximately £120 million – AK). Pawlowski, *Armia Smiglego*, 54.

[719] Jozef Beck, Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 16 Jul. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

[720] Jan Wszelaki, Economic Counsellor in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Michal Lubienski, Minister Beck's Chef de Cabinet in Warsaw, and Jozef Potocki, Head of the Western Department in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw 28 Jul. 1939. PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

[721] Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, to Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 23 Jul. 1839, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

[722] Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in

alliance treaty talks continued as before, and the Minister remained convinced that the political agreement with Britain was 'of incomparably greater importance than the (…) financial talks.'[723]

Until the very end, Jozef Beck held out hope that a military conflict could be averted by diplomatic means. Nothing illustrates his commitment to avoiding war as much as his last attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully. On the day of the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact – the impossible had become a reality – the Polish authorities were informed about another British attempt at mediation and warned not to do anything to provoke a hostile reaction from Berlin.[724] Hitler did not take the ensuing talks seriously but Beck hoped that a deal could be struck. And so when Rydz-Smigly's decision to mobilise resulted in panicked demarches from the British and French Ambassadors he pressurised the Marshal not to jeopardise peace talks and postpone mobilisation by one day, until 30 August. How he achieved this feat is unclear because the conversation between both men was unrecorded, but considering Rydz-Smigly's previously expressed doubts about the success of any Polish-German talks, Beck must have been extremely persuasive. The decision to push back the mobilisation greatly handicapped Poland in the first days of combat. German forces took advantage of the dislocation of troops and attacked units which were often under-strength, their soldiers still in transit.

London, 24 Jul. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

[723] Beck's response to Halifax's message. Jozef Beck, Minister for Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, to Edward Raczynski, Polish Ambassador in London, 28 Jul. 1939, PISM, A.11.49/WB/3.

[724] Beck, *Ostatni raport*, 183.

Conclusion

In the summer of 1939, the Polish army stores held just enough munitions to last it through one major battle. The Commander in Chief had no war plan and the Foreign Minister did not realise that the time for negotiations had run out. Not an auspicious set of circumstances in which to face an invasion. The German attack on 1 September 1939 caught Poland off guard. Urged by Ambassadors Kennard and Noel, Minister Beck persuaded Marshal Rydz-Smigly to postpone full mobilisation until 31 August. This meant that when the attack came the troops were dispersed, still in transit to their defensive positions as outlined in Plan 'Z', rendering it useless. Although individual formations resisted the German attack, there was little coherence in Polish army's activities.

The September Defensive Campaign could not have been won by Poland, especially after the USSR opened a second front.[725] Yet, this thesis argues that the many shortcomings in defence planning were avoidable, that Jozef Beck did not pursue the only policy available to him,[726] and Marshal Rydz-Smigly's western defence strategy did not fail solely due to Poland's lack of financial resources.[727] Neither can we lay the blame solely on wishful thinking.[728] This chapter

[725] See page 233 and Chapter Seven, page 235.

[726] Marek Kornat makes a case for this in his *Polityka Rownowagi 1934-1939: Polska miedzy Wschodem a Zachodem* [*The Policy of Equilibrium 1934-1939: Poland the East and the West*], (Krakow, 2007).

[727] A thesis propagated by Czeslaw Grzelak and Henryk Stanczyk in their *Kampania Polska 1939 Roku* [*The Polish Campaign of 1939*](Warszawa, 2005).

[728] As Roman Wapinski did in his essay: 'Rezultat kalkulacji czy chciejstwa? Kwestia współdzialania Niemiec i ZSSR przed 17 wrzesnia 1939 roku w wyobrazeniach polskich srodowisk przywódczych (Zarys problematyki)' ['Calculation or wishful thinking? The Polish leadership's views on the likelihood of German-Soviet cooperation before 17 September 1939'] in Henryk Batowski (ed.), *17 wrzesnia 1939. Materialy z ogólnopolskiej konferencji historyków, Kraków 25-*

demonstrates that throughout 1939 the Polish political and military leadership made a series of avoidable errors.

The secrecy that shrouded Germany's territorial demands towards Poland eroded the last remnants of trust between Minister Beck and Marshal Rydz-Smigly. The campaign of disinformation that ensued only confounded the Polish public, as well as her diplomats; Western governments who continued to view Poland as an aspiring member of the Axis, and finally Germany itself. Precious time that could otherwise be spent strategising or rearming was wasted, as the Polish authorities were unable to decide on a plan of action. In the end action was forced upon them when Germany decided to occupy Prague, started implementing its plans to encircle Poland and when Britain came forward with its guarantee.

As befitted one of the architects of the Polish-German Treaty of 1934, Jozef Beck never truly abandoned the hope that Poland and Germany could coexist peacefully. Underestimating the German threat, he was convinced that an agreement could be reached and conducted Polish foreign policy accordingly. However, by 1939, the relationship between Beck and Rydz-Smigly had broken down so much that not only was Beck pursuing German policy independently but the military had begun to deny him information about Poland's own capability and situation. Thus the Minister, perhaps always misguided about Germany, conducted policy in those critical months almost equally misguided about his own nation.

Beck was but one victim of a systematic military propaganda campaign. The General Staff might not have considered a German invasion until March 1939 but

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26 pazdziernika 1993 r. [*17 September 1939. Conference proceedings, Krakow, 25-26 October 1993*], (Krakow, 1994).

the Army had long cultivated the myths of Polish mighty military and its great commander Marshal Rydz-Smigly. Yet, when faced with the prospect of fighting a bloody and unequal combat, possibly on two fronts, Rydz-Smigly failed. He chose to ignore the signs of an upcoming Nazi-Soviet agreement and did not even attempt to prepare for the eventuality of a second attack. The optimistic view that prevailed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was shared by many of the Marshal's subordinates in the General Staff made this all the easier for him. Though he continued attempts to improve the state of the Polish army, he eventually fell victim to his own propaganda of success. The Polish economy was unable to support the country's war effort and the Treasury Ministry was unwilling to sacrifice the economy to prepare a supposedly already mighty force for a war that was not going to start. Beck's hauteur and the Treasury's sloth delayed the opening of the financial negotiations with Britain. The lack of a cohesive objective did little to help matters. After Poland broke of the financial talks, the material loan negotiations continued to drag on but were concluded too late to be of any significance.

This thesis examines the gradual erosion of trust and cooperation between the Foreign Ministry and the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces and 1939 was when these deep-rooted problems all came to a head. The Polish military and political leadership suffered from delusions about Poland's place in Europe, Germany's intentions and even their own army's capability. These problems were further exacerbated by the internal conflict that beleaguered the country's elites. In a time of an acute national crisis the Polish leadership should have come together to face the German threat united. Instead, as the situation worsened its members were

pulled further apart and in the end, not having prepared its country for war, the Polish leadership chose to flee.

Chapter Seven: *The Epilogue*

Together with most other ministries, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the bulk of the diplomatic corps accredited in Warsaw left the city on the evening of 4 September. The cavalcade of private and governmental cars, and lorries loaded with people, papers and a hodgepodge of personal possessions,[729] slowly weaved its way east - through the elegant spa town of Naleczow, Krzemieniec famous for its Lyceum, the historic town of Kolomyja and finally into the border-town of Kuty. The President, his entourage, and the government, including Minister Beck, all left a few days later and joined the convoy in Naleczow. They were closely followed by the General Staff and the Commander in Chief, Edward Rydz-Smigly. The Marshal was accompanied by his wife, who had recently returned from the French Riviera to pack up the couple's belongings. The unpopular Mrs Rydz once again raised eyebrows when she joined the column of refugees heading a procession of several cars carrying her family and servants and two lorries piled up with fittings from the Rydzs' state-owned official residence.[730]

The refugees arrived in Kuty on September 17th, barely hours before the Soviet aggression would open up a second front encircling the embattled Polish forces. The Red Army was advancing with considerable speed and, during an emergency session held in late afternoon, the government decided to cross over to Romania, Poland's

[729] Jan Szembek's wife Jadwiga, wrote after the war that in the rushed evacuation, her husband decided to leave behind the antique furniture, Aubusson carpets and most of the art in the couple's apartments but dragged with him two suitcases packed with his diaries and personal documents. These papers would later be published as a four-volume diary.

[730] Dariusz Baliszewski, 'Polska Femme Fatale' ['The Polish Femme Fatale'], *Wprost*, 51\52, (2006), 102-106.

historic ally with whose government Minister Beck had previously arranged for the safe passage of Polish dignitaries.

Initially, it was thought that the evacuation would be limited to civilians; the President, the government, various family members and the gold reserves of the Polish National Bank. Yet, on 18 September, Marshal Rydz-Smigly announced that he too had decided to cross the border, abandoning the fighting forces. He would later explain this decision by his faith 'in [Poland's] allies' word and [their] honour'.[731] In 1941, hiding in occupied Warsaw to which he had returned, Rydz-Smigly, echoing his pre-war convictions,[732] told General Maxymowicz-Raczynski's widow that he had hoped to entice Bucharest, Paris and London into immediate action on Poland's behalf.[733] Indeed, he even advised his troops to, if at all possible, retreat and cross over into allied countries – hoping that he could command the re-formed Polish army in exile.

Unsurprisingly, Rydz-Smigly's decision caused consternation and, not infrequently considerable anger, among his peers. Indeed, recalling that day, Colonel Stefan Sobocinski, who manned the border crossing with Romania, revealed that he threatened to court marshal a police inspector for defeatism after the latter announced that Marshal Rydz-Smigly's convoy was approaching the border

[731] Wspomnienia Reginy Maxymowicz-Raczynskiej. PISM-NY, *Kolekcja Edwarda Rydza-Smiglego*, Zes. 98/1.

[732] Recounting his 8 May 1939 conversation with Rydz-Smigly, Kazimierz Smagorzewski, correspondent of *Gazeta Polska* in Berlin, quotes the Marshal's belief in French and British assurances. Letter from Smagorzewski to Richard Wojtak, 16 April 1974. JPIoA, *Kolekcja Edwarda Rydza-Smiglego* Zes. 98/1.

[733] Wspomnienia Reginy Maxymowicz-Raczynskiej. PISM-NY, *Kolekcja Edwarda Rydza-Smiglego*, Zes. 98/1.

bridge.[734] Allegedly, some went even further. According to his niece's account, the Voivode of Posnania, Colonel Ludwik Bocianski, attempted to commit suicide in front of Rydz-Smigly in shame him into remaining in Poland.[735]

A fellow Legionary, Bocianski had known Rydz-Smigly for years so upon seeing the Marshal, he did not hesitate to bring the convoy to a halt. When the baffled Rydz-Smigly stepped out of the car, Bocianski tried to remonstrate with him – to save the 'Army's honour' – but got nowhere. So after the Marshal pushed him aside and turned to get back to his car, the Colonel took out his pistol, turned it on himself and fired. Rydz-Smigly's adjutants loaded Bocianski's seemingly lifeless body onto the car and the column resumed its journey.

Not long after Bocianski's attempted suicide, the Marshal would participate in another, although perhaps less spectacular, confrontation. After the Polish civilian and military authorities crossed into Romania, it became clear that Bucharest had reneged on its earlier promise of safe passage. In fact, the President, Ministers and the Commander in Chief were all to be interned.

According to an eye witness, as Marshal Rydz-Smigly boarded the official train and bade farewell to the gathered dignitaries, he refused to shake Minister Beck's hand, accusing him instead of deception.[736] We cannot be sure whether he was referring to the transit misunderstanding, Minister Beck's foreign policy doctrine, or, perhaps, both. What we do know, however, was that Jozef Beck also felt that he had

[734] Slawomir Koper, *Zycie prywatne elit Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej* [*The Private Life of the Elites of the Second Polish Republic*], (Warszawa, 2009), 238-239.
[735] Dariusz Baliszewski, 'Most honoru' ['The Bridge of Honour'], *Wprost*, 38 (2004), 72-76.
[736] Letter from Karol Wedziagolski published in *Kultura*, no. 153/154 (Paris, 1960).

been deceived. According to Waclaw Zbyszewski, while still in Poland, Minister Beck told his subordinates that he was misled by the military command. Indeed, in a language reminiscent of Pilsudski, the Minister complained that he 'thought he had a hundred divisions while in reality he had a pile of shit'.[737] In hindsight, Beck's closest associates all agreed that the Minister was ignorant of Poland's real military capability. Michal Lubienski even observed that Edward Rydz-Smigly avoided dialogue with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.[738] Indeed, Beck's Chef de Cabinet went so far as to imply that the Marshal might have had an ulterior motive in doing so. Presumably it was to trip Beck up and force his resignation from the Foreign Ministry.[739]

One of the examples of Beck's apparent ignorance of the military imbalance cited by Lubienski was his opinion about the state of the Polish air force. Apparently during count Galeazzo Ciano's 1939 visit, Beck boasted to his Italian counterpart about Poland's state-of-the-art air force. The Italian foreign minister allegedly went green with envy after being told by his hosts that Poland had six aircraft regiments of advanced aircraft just like the one he was visiting.[740] In reality he was looking at nearly the entire Polish air force. The country's military aviation was a shambles and grossly underfunded. Indeed, even the money generously donated by the public towards its build up was redirected to plug up holes in the military budget. Beck was similarly mistaken about the Polish capability vis-a-vis Danzig.

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[737] Waclaw Zbyszewski, *Gawedy o ludziach i czasach przedwojennych* [*Stories of pre-War times and people*], (Warszawa, 2000), 254.
[738] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, p. 11. JPIoA *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina* Zes. 103/28.
[739] This could be inferred from Lubienski's belief (discussed earlier in this thesis) that the Minister's position depended on delivering continuous diplomatic successes. Please refer to Chapter Four, pages161-162.
[740] Michal Lubienski's manuscript, p. 60. JPIoA *Kolekcja Jana Weinsteina* Zes. 103/28.

Beck's and Rydz-Smigly's September 1939 comments suggest that both men realized the consequences of their poor relationship much too late. Rather than acknowledge their mutual fault, they never ceased to blame the other.

Chapter Eight: *Conclusion*

In this thesis I set out to examine two intertwined themes in Polish domestic and foreign policy. My first objective was to examine the inception and evolution of the interpersonal conflict between Minister Beck and Marshal Rydz-Smigly. The second task was to assess the effect this poor relationship had on the institutions led by both men and on their perception of the German threat.

Both Jozef Beck and Edward Rydz-Smigly were products of the struggle for Polish independence and Pilsudski's regime. Indeed, one may even call them 'Pilsudski's children'. They met Poland's first Marshal as young men and came of political age in his shadow. In May 1926, both Colonel Beck and General Rydz-Smigly supported Pilsudski's coup d'état and were later rewarded for their loyalty with positions of power. They both referred to the Marshal as 'the Commandant' and, ostensibly, afforded him considerable reverence. Yet we saw that in reality their attitude towards Pilsudski differed. For Beck, he was a father figure. And along with his sayings, the Minister adopted Pilsudski's worldview. Rydz-Smigly, on the other hand, saw in the Marshal his commanding officer whose orders must be carried out. However, he had previously experienced the older man's volatility and, as Pilsudski's health deteriorated rapidly, became increasingly wary of his decisions. The Marshal's death in 1935 brought this difference in outlook between Beck and Rydz-Smigly into the open.

In a bid to entrench his position, Edward Rydz-Smigly lent his support to the President who wanted to neutralise the 'Colonels' forming Pilsudski's inner circle and consolidate his power. With the new General Inspector's cooperation, Moscicki successfully outmaneuvered the then Prime Minister Walery Slawek and formed a government of his choosing. Jozef Beck was one of the few survivors of this 'purge'. But although he had remained neutral, the blatant disregard of the late Marshal's wishes made him suspicious of the new government.

He soon found that the feeling was mutual. Rydz-Smigly did not agree with the Minister's pro-German line. This, we saw, would eventually lead to his direct interference in Poland's foreign affairs. In the beginning, this was limited to vetoing proposed members of diplomatic delegations. Rydz-Smigly's first direct foray into diplomacy was his September 1936 visit to France organised by the French Ambassador to Warsaw, Leon Noel. While the trip did not deliver the results Noel had hoped for – the severe weakening or ousting of the Foreign Minister – it successfully stoked existing tensions between the Ministry and the General Inspectorate. The visit, which was initially agreed without the Minister's knowledge, turned out to be a success – a propaganda coup. Edward Rydz-Smigly not only revived the flailing Franco-Polish military alliance but also signed the Rambouillet Treaty securing a financial and material commitment from the French whom Beck disliked and, like Pilsudski, distrusted.[741]

Much to the Foreign Minister's annoyance, Rydz-Smigly attempted to capitalise on his diplomatic victory at home. His controversial promotion to Marshal and elevation to Poland's 'First Citizen' came shortly after the French visit. Beck and

[741] See Chapter Three, pages 126 – 127.

many other ‘Colonels’ saw this as chutzpah and resented the usurper of Pilsudski's place. However, neither the Foreign Minister nor anybody else was able to openly resist Rydz-Smigly's rise. Instead, the Minister's opposition took the form of disruption. If he ostensibly accepted the new Marshal's authority over most areas of foreign policy, he tried to keep sole control over the Polish-German relations. The atmosphere between both men became so bad that it necessitated *formal* reconciliation in early 1937.

We know that this 'patching up' had little long-term impact. Indeed, the formation in 1937 of the Camp of National Unity reignited the smouldering conflict. Intended as the political force behind Rydz-Smigly, the OZN sought with varying success to engage with the Opposition. However, the alliance with ONR-Falanga, an extreme wing of the National Democrats, only exacerbated the decomposition of the Pilsudskite Sanacja. Politically inactive Pilsudskites protested or shunned events organised by the Camp and its members. Minister Beck also refused to join the movement, but his Ministry initially succeeded in maintaining a working relationship with the military.

However, by November 1937, Beck and Rydz-Smigly were drawn into conflict again as the Marshal's internal politics increasingly frustrated the Minister. The nationalistic agenda advocated by the OZN interfered with the diplomats' work in an area over which it had previously enjoyed full control: Polish-German relations. A seemingly minor event – the likely publication of an aggressive editorial, which prevented Warsaw from reaching an agreement with Danzig over the Free City's proposed constitutional amendments, proved crucial for the Beck – Rydz-Smigly

relationship. Suddenly everyone in the elite knew that the author of Poland's international strategy, Jozef Beck and its highest military authority, Edward Rydz-Smigly, disagreed about the country's foreign policy. Worse still, this realisation prompted many to try to by-pass the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and settle matters directly with Marshal Rydz-Smigly.

The Germans now adopted the tactic, previously employed by the French, of bypassing the diplomats and liaising directly with the military leadership. The move by the Auswartiges Amt to step up their attempts at building a rapport with Marshal Rydz-Smigly and thereby entice Poland into joining the Anti-Commintern Pact particularly disconcerted Jozef Beck, who was previously able to stave off dismissal thanks to knowledge of and good relations with the Nazi leadership. And even though German efforts bore no fruit and did not shake off Marshal Rydz-Smigly 's suspicions of the Third Reich, they made Minister Beck realise that his government position was uncertain. Consequently, we saw that in an attempt to hold on to his post, Jozef Beck increasingly focused on delivering successes.

Before 1937 ended, he proceeded to reassert his relevance to the German leadership and to stop the Polish-Danzig conflict from escalating. This 'achievement' took the form of two separate, although coordinated, declarations in which Warsaw and Berlin agreed to uphold the rights of their respective ethnic minorities. The announcements were contingency measures and, in a bid to rebuild Jozef Beck's prestige, their importance was overblown.

Indeed, 1937 – a year far more eventful than it appeared at first sight - could be regarded as the watershed moment for the Beck – Rydz-Smigly relationship. The

Marshal's steadily growing influence over Polish politics changed the country and the authoritarian regime that governed it. Despite its initial difficulties, the Camp of National Unity provided a sufficient support base to allow Rydz-Smigly and his associates to alter the Sanacja ideology and marginalise the Colonels. For Jozef Beck, who never joined the OZN and had been suspicious of the organisation since its inception, these changes were unacceptable. As a man whom we know to have lived his life by Pilsudski's rules and a Minister determined to adhere to foreign policy directives issued from the first Marshal's deathbed, he disapproved of an alliance with the National Democrats so despised by his idol. Similarly, the Camp's nationalistic propaganda – aimed at increasing Rydz-Smigly 's internal popularity – made Beck's work more difficult. Moreover, we must not forget about the Krakow incident that further complicated matters between the Bruehl's Palace and Wierzbowa. Cardinal Sapiecha's willful decision to move Jozef Pilsudski's remains from their original resting place may seem trivial, and the controversy surrounding it absurd. But for Beck, emotional attachment to the dead Marshal was so powerful; it embodied all that was going wrong in Poland. Not only did Marshal Rydz-Smigly's half-hearted reprimand prove the growing influence of the National Democrats, worse still, it suggested that many of Pilsudski's old soldiers were abandoning his cause and deviating from their erstwhile leader's creed.

This realisation introduced a new dynamic into the strife central to this thesis. As noted earlier, convinced that his position was weak but nevertheless intent on staying in office to uphold the foreign policy prescribed by Pilsudski, Jozef Beck looked to secure his position through diplomatic successes. This change in attitude was obvious to his closest associates, who noted the Minister's increased appetite for risk.

And while Beck was no ministerial rogue, who could be held solely responsible for the disastrous September 1939 campaign, his newfound willingness to make political bets had a profound effect on Poland's military preparedness and its perception of the German threat.

Initially everything seemed to be going well. At first, a happy coincidence enabled Warsaw to end the 18-year long impasse in her relations with Kaunas. A border incident served as a pretext to send out an ultimatum demanding the establishment of diplomatic relations. Lithuania bowed to its terms. The Polish public, stirred up by a press campaign, was ecstatic. Minister Beck was pleased not just because he fulfilled the late Marshal's wish but also because he managed to deliver it on his (that is, both the Marshal's and the Minister's own) name day. But despite the symbolism, most of the glory for Poland's success went to Pilsudski's successor, Edward Rydz-Smigly who was, unsurprisingly, delighted.

As we know, issuing an ultimatum was Minister Beck's ingenious solution to an internal disagreement. The President and his protégée, Finance Minister, Kwiatkowski clashed with Rydz-Smigly and his supporter Premier Skladkowski. The former wanted to talk with the Lithuanians, the latter to fight. The nation, goaded by the OZN's bellicose propaganda called for an invasion. In these circumstances, Beck's suggestion seemed like a reasonable compromise. However, the Foreign Ministry did not take timing into account. The Polish-Lithuanian border incident came just days after the Nazi ultimatum forced the Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg to acquiesce to the Anschluss. Thus, although they urged Kaunas to accept Warsaw's demand, many in London and Paris suspected collusion with

Berlin. Their assumption was inaccurate but in the Western Powers' eyes it marked Poland down as an opportunist nation. Indeed, it took some effort by the British Ambassador Sir Howard Kennard to discourage his superiors from giving up on Warsaw.[742]

Beck's strategy fooled outsiders into thinking that Poland was gravitating towards Germany but its impact on domestic politics was no less profound. The huge popularity of the Lithuanian cause confirmed that Rydz-Smigly's and the OZN's strategy of combining post-May 1926 reverence of the Army with nationalistic propaganda was working. The public responded to strong speeches and demonstrations of strength. This realisation helps to explain the readiness with which Poland's leaders agreed to act in Czechoslovakia.

As we have seen, the literature on the Polish-Czechoslovak crisis of 1938 often concentrates on the role played in it by Minister Beck. However, this thesis demonstrates that this focus is not wholly justified. Jozef Beck was not the sole driving force behind Warsaw's plans to reclaim Teschen Silesia and Marshal Rydz-Smigly and President Moscicki's aquiescence in the scheme was not secured by the Minister's persuasion. For instance, the Polish military newspaper *Polska Zbrojna* had been running an anti-Czech campaign since the spring of 1938. And while the territorial dispute ensured that no love had ever been lost between Warsaw and Prague, foreign diplomats had begun to remark on the Polish military's increasingly aggressive attitude toward Czechoslovakia.[743] The timing – shortly after the Anschluss – is significant and suggests that the change could be attributed to the

[742] See Chapter Four, pages 167 – 169.
[743] See Chapter Five, pages 184 – 186.

strategists' realisation that Czechoslovakia was likely to become Germany's next target. This, in turn, raised the possibility of a Soviet intervention on behalf of its ally in Prague. As work on the defensive plan 'Wschod' neared its end, the planners realised it would be rendered void if the Russian Army were stationed to the south, benefiting from Czechoslovak military infrastructure. Thus, the military command pushed for achieving a common border with Hungary.

Minister Beck broadly agreed. However, contrary to the popular depiction of the crisis, the decision makers were not unanimous. Although in February 1938 Beck spoke about a common border with Regent Horthy, he did not see its establishment as an urgent matter, unlike that of reclaiming the lost Teschen Silesia about which the Foreign Ministry, the military and the presidency were all in agreement. Therefore, for a brief period during which Polish authorities decided on their course of action, we can see full cooperation between the Foreign Ministry and the military high command. Nevertheless, although Minister Beck and Marshal Rydz-Smigly remained in constant contact with each other, their communication was not very effective. Indeed, even agreeing as to what constituted 'the lost Teschen Silesia' proved difficult. To the Minister it meant only territory inhabited by a Polish majority, whereas the Army included additional Slovak territory. Eventually the military's version prevailed. So, despite Beck's protests and threats of resignation, in October 1938 Poland incorporated small but supposedly strategically important parts of Spisz and Jaworzyna.

As it turns out, the Army's reasoning proved very shortsighted. Not only did their action cause resentment towards Warsaw among previously sympathetic Slovaks, it

also prevented Minister Beck from continuing his talks with the pro-Polish section of the Slovak nationalist movement. Alienated, Slovakia turned towards the Third Reich, compromising Poland's strategic position and surprising many of her officers who expected Slovakia to become their country's natural ally.

The debacle over Slovakia happened shortly after Beck's confrontation with Rydz-Smigly and Moscicki over their treatment of Walery Slawek, and this time the disagreement proved too much for the Minister. Immediately after the Polish acquisition of Teschen Silesia, Beck's relationship with Marshal Rydz-Smigly collapsed. Clearly unhappy about the direction Poland's new leadership was heading in and their propensity to exploit foreign affairs for domestic gains, Jozef Beck decided to shield his domain from further political interference. To this effect, the Minister hid the existence of German territorial demands, which arrived on 23 October 1938. This move proved just as shortsighted as the military's insistence on claiming a few mountain passes, because, while he won himself time in which to mull over the Nazi claims and contemplate ways in which they could be accommodated, Beck denied the military arguments against spending cuts, thus impeding Poland's armament modernisation and her overall war preparedness.

We know that the Minister was denied accurate information about the Polish Army's military readiness. So was almost everyone else in Poland, including the Finance Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. Moscicki's protégé, who was disliked by both Beck and Rydz-Smigly and by and large reciprocated their feelings. Moreover, Moscicki's political backing made him less susceptible to pressure. Despite

struggling with a prolonged financial crisis, Poland consistently spend a third of its GDP on the military, a staggering amount considering the country's financial situation but not enough to quickly meet the Armed Forces' equipment needs.[744] Diverting greater funds from the budget or a greater focus on arms manufacturing would have endangered the country's fragile economic recovery. Despite the boost provided by the annexation of Teschen Silesia, whose mines and factories significantly added to Poland's industrial output, Kwiatkowski was unwilling to risk recession without a valid reason. So as long as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs assured the Treasury that all was well between Warsaw and Berlin, the powers controlling the public purse refused to loosen its strings. After all, in autumn 1938 Poland appeared to be in a better strategic position then ever. Despite the snub of not being recognised as a major player in the region by the Great Power statesmen convening in Munich, Poland's decision to pursue an independent foreign policy brought two major diplomatic victories. The country now enjoyed proper working relations with all its neighbours and would soon share a border with friendly Hungary. Moreover, Poland's western and eastern boundaries were secured by two Non-Aggression agreements. Yet the OZN's growing nationalism and Minister Beck's policy of wielding threats and ultimatums raised eyebrows in London and Paris and alienated Poland's neighbours.

Furthermore, as militaristic propaganda became more intense in 1938-39 even its authors began to lose grasp on strategic reality and through the last months of peace, Polish policy makers and commanders lived in part in make-believe worlds founded

[744] Tymoteusz Pawlowski, *Armia Smiglego. Czwarta w Europie – Siodma na Swiecie* [*Smigly's Army. Fourth in Europe – Seventh in the World*], (Warszawa, 2014), 50 – 54.

on a whole series of misperceptions and miscalculations and separate ones to boot. In the world inhabited by Minister Beck, his German counterpart was independently pursuing his own interest in Danzig. Once it became clear that the initiative had the Fuhrer's backing it was played down as bluff because in Beck's eyes Hitler was a political opportunist after quick and cheap gains, and not an aggressor bent on igniting a European war. Beck simultaneously maintained that he was an ideologue, incapable of making pragmatic compromises like an alliance with the Reich's archenemy the Soviet Union. Germany's March 1939 invasion of the rump of the Czechoslovak state put a question mark beside Beck's first assertion, but despite intelligence reports advising to the contrary, he clung to his second belief until the signing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact proved him wrong again.

Reading too much into German press's reaction to Ribbentrop's politeness during his successful visit to Warsaw, Beck paid no heed to diplomatic reports raising the alarm that the growing anti-Polish hostility among Nazi officer corps and the construction of fortifications ominously close to Polish borders. This tactic of downplaying the German threat proved particularly damaging in 1939, when it indefinitely delayed the introduction of a third work shift towards arms production by again failing to provide arguments to convince Finance Minister Kwiatkowski to sanction it.

While the Foreign Minister was unwilling to credit the increasingly worrying intelligence reports warning of a Nazi-Soviet détente and suspicious German military activity, Marshal Rydz-Smigly, who scarcely trusted the Minister and found what trust he had further eroded by the latter's concealment of the initial German

territorial demands, was willing to investigate them. He requested, to some internal resistance, that all Polish foreign representatives brief him when in the capital. But caught up in the internal power struggle, he too failed to act on their reports. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Six, in a mistimed attempt to introduce 'his' people into the administration, Rydz-Smigly severely impaired the effectiveness of the Second Department of General Staff – the Polish Intelligence Service – in the immediate run-up to the Second World War.[745]

Meanwhile, Poland's strategic position had been eroded substantially. The German invasion of the Czech lands, the acquisition of Klaipeda and particularly the establishment of a protectorate over Slovakia caused panic among the Polish military leadership. The realization that the strategic situation had worsened caused a backlash against Jozef Beck. He was attacked by the OZN-dominated Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs and even accused of treason.

Yet, despite their rising unease, the high command continued to propund the image of military might. As Stanislaw Mackiewicz discovered, pointing out the evident gap between Polish and German capability was a dangerous occupation that carried with it the risk of imprisonment on the charge of defeatism. Poland's French allies were also deceived about Warsaw's strength, but the deception proved particularly damaging for foreign policy formation. Unaware of his country's weakness, Minister Beck pursued diplomacy that did not match Polish strength. Having assumed that Germany would be unwilling to attack a Poland capable of putting up a prolonged fight and thus weakening its strategic position vis-à-vis

[745] See Chapter Six, page 216.

France and Britain, his policy was riskier than it otherwise might have been. In fact, had he known that Polish munitions stores contained little more than thin air, he might have been less willing to brandish the British guarantee which was bound to, and indeed did, vex Germany. Lacking accurate information about the state of the Polish Army, Beck hoped that the agreement would be a deterrent to a German Chancellor who continually stressed the importance of good relations with the United Kingdom. It was a gamble he lost and the Minister was soon forced to embrace the failure of the foreign policy guided by Marshal Pilsudski's instructions. Beck's 5 May 1939 parliamentary speech was rapturously received, but was also the Minister's admission of failure. Marshal Rydz-Smigly might have felt vindicated as he always mistrusted Beck's pro-German line but he himself was not without blame.

In the course of this thesis I have examined the conflict between Jozef Beck and Edward Rydz-Smigly from its origins immediately after the death of Marshal Pilsudski until the outbreak of the Second World War. It first manifested itself over both men's different attitude to the Polish alliance with France but soon evolved into a deeper ‘ideological’ struggle. As he assumed the top command, Rydz-Smigly's relations with Beck cooled, while the Minister started to view the new Marshal as a usurper, claiming not only Pilsudski's title but also his policy-making prerogatives.

The struggle was an unequal one and Beck soon found himself conceding some of his powers to Rydz-Smigly who was able to block diplomatic nominations and influence policy in all areas bar Polish-German relations. Eighteen months after Pilsudski's death the rivalry between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the General Inspectorate for the Armed Forces became common knowledge among

Warsaw's elite, and attracted the attention of foreign powers looking to exploit it to serve their purposes. Eventually, the situation deteriorated to the point when formal reconciliation became necessary. But the 1937 shaking of hands had no effect on Beck and Rydz-Smigly's relationship. In fact, as the Marshal battled for power and influence in Poland, the conflict only grew worse. His brief flirtation with the National Democrats and the subsequent adoption of some nationalist principles by his Camp of National Unity started to interfere with the Foreign Minister's German strategy. Moreover, as he came under increasing fire for cosying up to Berlin, Beck looked to strengthen his position by delivering popular diplomatic successes. His popularity soared after the establishment of relations with Lithuania and again, after the incorporation of Teschen Silesia but so, and to a greater extent, did Rydz-Smigly's.

Moreover, as appalled officials in Paris and London grew increasingly suspicious of Warsaw, inside Poland the 'glorious' coups de main of 1938 increased the Poles' confidence in their military might, a misconception irresponsibly perpetuated by the OZN's propaganda. Feeling stronger, the country grew less conciliatory and more nationalistic. Indeed, it is probable that had they been made public, the German territorial demands of October 1938 would have resulted in an open confrontation. Minister Beck's uncertainty about the origin of these claims and his lack of trust in his Cabinet colleagues' discretion led him to conceal their existence until early January 1939. Undoubtedly, this lost Poland precious time to prepare for war. However, the military was not itself without fault as it had consistently misinformed the Minister and, indeed, the rest of the government, about Poland's military readiness. Convinced of Poland's high capability and reassured about Germany's

good intentions, Finance Minister Kwiatkowski refused to increase military spending, denying his country the opportunity to ready itself against the Third Reich.

And, while it is unlikely that Poland could have rearmed sufficiently to successfully defend itself against Germany – let alone Germany and the Soviet Union - the broken relationship between Beck and Rydz-Smigly denied Poland the chance to better the odds it faced. Thus, in the run up to the Second World War, the Marshal and the Minister really did make *the worst of a bad situation*.

<u>Appendix 1</u>: The Organisational Structure of the Polish Military Command (April 1935 – September 1939)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">SUPREME COMMAND
President
(Commander in Chief in Peacetime)
(Ignacy Moscicki)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">PEACETIME COMMAND
Minister for Military Affairs
(General Tadeusz Kasprzycki)
Reported to → Prime Minister[746]</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">WARTIME COMMAND
General Inspector of the Armed Forces
(Commander in Chief in Wartime)
(Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly)
Reported to → President</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">In charge of:
Minister’s Office
Corps District Command (DOK)
Naval Command
Chief Military Prosecution Office
Military Vicariate
Personnel Bureau</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>General Staff</td><td>Other (ctd)</td></tr>
<tr><td>1st Deputy Minister
(General Janusz Gluchowski)</td><td>2nd Deputy Minister
(General Aleksander Litwinowicz)</td><td>Chief of Staff
(General Waclaw Stachiewicz)</td><td>Inspectors of the Armed Forces and Generals delegated to the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces</td></tr>
</table>

[746] It is important to note that, in theory, there was no hierarchical relationship between the Ministry for Military Affairs and the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces. However, Rydz-Smigly’s more senior Rank as well as the fact that he reported directly to the Supreme Commander (Moscicki), meant that, in reality, the Ministry was seen as subordinate to the General Inspectorate.

<table>
<tr><td>Responsible for:
➢ Peacetime command
➢ General organization of the Army (e.g: conscription, training)</td><td>Responsible for:
➢ All administrative affairs of the Army (e.g.: budget, provisions)
➢ Representing the Minister in Parliament</td><td>Responsible for:
➢ Combat readiness
➢ Military planning

Departments:
I Organisation and Mobilisation
II Information and Intelligence
III Operational and Strategic
IV Logistics</td><td>Responsible for:
➢ Troop inspections
➢ Planning work</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">In charge of:</td><td>Other</td><td>Secretariat of the Committee for National Defense</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bureau for General Organisation</td><td>Bureau for General Administration</td><td>Committee for Armaments and Equipment</td><td>Inspection Bureau</td></tr>
<tr><td>Departments:
I Infantry
II Cavalry
III Artillery
IV Aviation</td><td rowspan="2">Departments:
V Engineering Corps
VI Construction Corps
VII Commissariat
VIII Sanitary Corps
IX Justice
X Military Industry</td><td rowspan="2">Military Education:
War College
Commissariat College
Military Geographical Institute
Military Research and Publishing Institute</td><td>Chapter of the Order of the Virtuti Militari</td></tr>
<tr><td>Military Gendarmerie Command</td><td>Military Historical Bureau</td></tr>
</table>

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